

# Christian Scriver

## Gotthold's Emblems



# Gotthold's Emblems

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PASTOR BRAUNS.

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# Gotthold's Emblems:

*or, Invisible Things Understood By  
Things That Are Made*

By Christian Sriver

MINISTER OF MAGDEBURG IN 1671.

Translated from the Twenty-Eighth German Edition by The  
Rev. Robert Menzies, Hoddam, England

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GOULD AND LINCOLN  
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“Find tongues in trees,  
Books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones,  
and GOD in everything.”

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## **A Note about Typos** [Typographical Errors]:

Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

# American Publishers' Note (From the 1859 Edition)

IN INTRODUCING GOTTHOLD'S EMBLEMS to the American public, the publishers feel assured it will receive a cordial welcome from Christian readers. It is, indeed, a matter of surprise, that a work of such pre-eminent merit should have circulated in German homes for nearly two centuries, without finding an English translator. Its popularity in Germany, on its first appearance, was not inferior to that of the best productions of Luther, in the previous century. More than twenty editions were rapidly issued, to meet the eager demand; and when at length it had fallen into a temporary oblivion, the extraordinary value attached to stray copies by the families in which they were heirlooms, made it difficult for an editor to obtain a single copy, even for use in preparing a new edition. The publishers are not aware that any work of its precise character is to be found in the English language, and they feel assured it will supply an important defect in our devotional literature. It will aid devout Christians to look with open eye on the wonderful works of God, which need to be "sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." The inspired writers found a stimulus to profound Christian feeling in the contemplation of the works of nature: and the psalmist and prophets soared to their sublimest heights of devotion, when listening to the mystic strains in which the heavens and earth and the great deep chanted the praises of God. Every thoughtful Christian ought to see, like them, in his daily walks, convincing proof that the God of nature is also the God of the Bible, and find his soul quickened to praise by beautiful and suggestive emblems of a wise and loving and omnipotent Creator.

The volume has been prepared from the English edition in two volumes. The order of the English translator has not, in all cases, been strictly adhered to; and a few of the "meditations," which seemed less freighted with



devotional feelings, and whose subjects or mode of treatment might be thought objectionable by some fastidious readers, have been omitted.

If the work shall be received with that favor which the publishers anticipate, it will be followed by a second volume, compiled from other “meditations,” some of which have not yet been translated.

# Translator's Preface (From the 1859 Edition)

THE WORK which is here presented to the English reader belongs to a class of which the importation from Germany into this country has been comparatively small. We have received large supplies of her scientific theology, in the shape of expositions of Scripture and histories of the Church and its doctrine. We have also received a few admirable specimens of her practical divinity, such as the Sermons of Krummacher. But, with her strictly devotional literature, we are, as yet, with the solitary though noble exception of Bogatzky's "Golden Treasury," almost entirely unacquainted. This, however, is just the field in which the deep sentiment which forms the prominent feature in the character of the nation, and lends so powerful a charm to their poetry and music, seems peculiarly to fit the Germans to excel, – nay, it is the field in which they have in fact excelled. Their literature is rich in works addressed to the religious affections, and designed to feed the lamp of faith, and fan the flame of devotion in the heart, and which occupy, in their pious families, the place occupied in our own by the "Saint's Everlasting Rest," Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," Flavel's "Token for Mourners," and Hervey's "Meditations." For instance, Dr. Tholuck's *Stunden der Andacht* HOURS OF DEVOTION stands pre-eminent among all modern productions of this class. It is a work without a rival in any language, and loudly calls for some skillful pen to transplant it worthily into our own. And here is another, nearly two centuries old, but still instinct with the vigor and freshness of youth, which reappears, like the spirit of a departed saint, and claims audience, while, in accents strangely sweet and solemn, it discourses to us of eternal things.

To satisfy the natural curiosity of the reader, the following particulars respecting the author and his work are premised. They are borrowed from the

twenty-eighth edition of it, which was published at Barmen in 1846, and is the one from which the present translation has been made.

Christian Scriver was born on the 2nd January, 1629, at Rendsburg, studied at Rostock, was appointed deacon at Stendal in 1653, pastor of the Church of St. James', at Magdeburg, in 1667, and court preacher and consistorial [CHURCH GOVERNMENT] councilor at Quedlinburg in 1690, where, on the 5th of April, 1693, he departed this life.

The honors and applause paid by his contemporaries to this richly gifted minister of the pure word of God, are almost without a parallel. Not only was he so precious and dear to his congregation at Magdeburg, that, according to his own public testimony, at parting from them, they would, if possible, "have plucked out and given him their eyes:" but he inspired the warmest affection in Christian brethren, in quarters far beyond the narrow limits of his personal labors, and frequently received from them addresses full of acknowledgment and gratitude. The Queen of Sweden (at that time the first and most powerful Protestant kingdom in the world) invited him to be her spiritual guide and court preacher at Stockholm; and he wept, and was inconsolable, when, feeling the infirmities of age, and prompted by modesty and attachment to his flock and sorely afflicted fatherland, he declined the honorable call. The most eminent theologians of the day also looked up to him with boundless esteem, and humbly yielded the palm to one who was himself the humblest of them all. The celebrated Spener often extolled Scriver, and says, "In him I am sensible of a much richer measure of grace than has been allotted to myself." In one passage, he longs for the opportunity of once more, in this present life, seeing and conversing with that chosen friend of God, as a mercy for which he would require specially to thank the Lord. Dr. Pritius, J. F. Buddeus, and Chr. Eb. Weismann, in writings that survive, are, in like manner, full of his praise. The last designates him as "an excellent instrument of God, a man of genuine piety, holy eloquence, spiritual discernment, and fascinating power." Scriver's numerous writings were read, applauded, and almost devoured, wherever the German language was known, and the evangelical church possessed living members; and the principal of them passed through numerous editions, even after the author's death.

That Scriver was afterwards, for a long time, almost forgotten, arose, no doubt, partly from the ascendancy gained, in many ways, by infidelity, and partly, also, from the gradual progress made, and the changes undergone, by the German language, while no one appeared capable of judiciously applying a helping hand, in this respect, to the works of our author, whose language, notwithstanding, may to this day be, in numberless passages, designated truly classical.

It appears as if he had had a presentiment of the fate of his books, when, in a meditation, he says: "All things shall be alike to me, be they lofty, or be they low; favor and affliction, honor and disgrace; whichever accords with Thy most sweet and holy pleasure. Come on, world! toss me to and fro, up and down, on the bench or under it, into the light or into the dark corner. To me it is the same; toss me where thou wilt, there shall my God find me, and thence will He one day draw me forth." This is exactly what he has experienced in his writings. He was tossed to and fro, up and down, under the bench, and into the dark corner, but God has again brought him forth into the light.

His works had entirely disappeared out of the booksellers' shops, when some stray copies of them, almost entirely decayed, and secretly valued by their owners as the legacy of pious ancestors<sup>1</sup>, but generally despised, ridiculed, and rejected, fell into the hands of some Christian and judicious men, who were not deterred from reading and examining them, either by the dust which time had accumulated on their boards, or yet by the partially antiquated language of the contents. They instantly felt that the Spirit of God and of genuine Christianity, breathed out of the sallow pages, – and began to vie with each other, and with his admirers of a bygone age, in praising and applauding the author. "Scriver," says one of them, "is luminous as the Alpine peaks, when the sun rises in his grandeur; sharp as the sword of Gideon, sweet as honey and the honeycomb, gentle as vernal dew in the glimmer of the moon, fruitful as a garden which God has blessed, and Christian as an apostle."

"Confessions of Faith," as another testifies, "can hinder no one from drawing from this fountain; for Scriver was a Christian, and lived upon the heights of Christianity – high above the strifes of pride." To collect all that has been said or written in his praise, would fill a volume. We cannot, however, refrain from quoting a few detached sentences from the most recent

biography of Scriver, by Pastor Brauns, written generally in a strain of almost hymnal panegyric.

“Scriver,” it is said, “had no equal in his day. In the spacious halls of Scripture, he wanders up and down, more at home than in his own house. He plays on its thousand strings, like David on his harp, without one false note. He is never beneath and never above but always at the vital center of the word. From that the stream of his discourse flows forth, clear as the crystal spring of Siloa, and strong as the flood of Jordan, descending from Lebanon through the flowery borders of the Holy Land. His preaching is a tempest in the sky, a gentle May shower dropping through the sunshine upon the parched land, gleams of lightning, that terrify the night; peals of thunder making the earth tremble under the foot of the traveler. But come and see. Do more; read the works of this old Psalmist.”

“As the fruit of his unparalleled familiarity with Scripture, and a faith in it so firm, that, far from excluding any essential part, he will not so much as pass a letter with indifference, Scriver evinces a profound piety, conscious at every moment, and in every place, of being encompassed, upheld, and cherished by God, and which visibly sees and palpably feels His universal agency. In short, a consciousness of the Deity is as much his vital element, as water is to the fish. A bird in the air, a flower by the wayside, every thorn-bush he meets, arrests him; he cannot choose, but stop and contemplate, adore and exult.” “Scriver is always before God, in God, and with God. God is present to him in nature, in history, in every occurrence, however trivial and unimportant. The Divine Being, Will, Decrees, and Grace, it is the equally delightful and imperative task of his life to discover in all that is or happens, to proclaim with gratitude and praise, and emphatically to recommend for the elevation of the heart.” “As he gazes, listens, and sinks his affections into the infinity of the Divine love, Scriver is sometimes, as it were, transported out of himself. Intoxicated with the vision of God, his whole being dissolves into love, gratitude, and praise.” “His life was a life in God. As he could not but eat and drink, so he could not but pray. To omit this duty, or regard it as useless, is to him an abhorrence and abomination. A holy anger seizes him when his eye alights upon the atheists of his day.” “If any clergyman needs a spiritual guide, let him choose Scriver. He is the preacher for preachers, full of consolation and encouragement to the well-meaning, but a storm of hail to the faithless and slothful pastor.”

We have excluded a number of pieces and paragraphs which seemed of less general interest, and in others have with a cautious hand smoothed the asperities of language.

The translator has only to add, that the rest of the Meditations will be forthcoming, in due time, if there shall appear to be any wish on the part of the public to receive them.

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1. The editor of the twenty-third edition of Gotthold's Emblems states, as one of his difficulties, the impossibility of procuring a copy of the work, as the parties who possessed it refused to part with it for any price!↩

# Dedication

MY GOD! From this time at which he now completes his work, and gives it to the light, it is just a year since Thy servant was at the point of death, and in the eyes of many was even already dead. I had brought the “Incidental Devotions” down as far as “The Rod,” when it pleased Thee to judge me worthy of experiencing the truth of what I had written concerning it. My strength departed, my countenance became wan and emaciated, my tongue cleaved for weakness to the roof of my mouth, and could scarcely tell the physicians how sorely parched my body was with fever. My nails were white. Faint and scarcely audible was the beating of my heart. I had bid farewell to my dear friends, and with joyful longing (as Thou knowest) counted the hours, after the lapse of which I hoped to be with Thee, and to enjoy Thine ineffable glory. There were believing souls, however, who, with a thousand tears and sighs, lay prostrate at Thy feet, and implored of Thee to spare my life. And so it seemed good to Thy mercy to add to the number of my years. Thou didst strengthen and raise me up. I was made a miracle and monument of Thine Almighty power and goodness. Thou hast showed to myself and others that our God is the God of salvation, and that with God the Lord belong the issues from death. What else, then, can I do, but thank Thee for Thy faithfulness? My lips and my soul, which Thou hast redeemed, shall rejoice in Thee, and sing Thy praise; and to Thee this life, mercifully granted a second time, shall be henceforth consecrated.

It is true, my Father! that a worse thing afterwards befell me. One cross was made to succeed another. Thou tookest away the delight of mine eyes, I could have said of my heart, had I not thought such a name too much for a mortal creature. I had received from Thee an image which I bore about in my bosom, as the visible mark of Thy favor, and loved it for the graces and virtues which Thou hadst impressed upon it. Alas, my God! well do I remember how the dear soul, when she saw my danger, cast herself upon her face before Thee, and with so many deep sighs and burning tears, offered

her life as the ransom for mine, – how she forgot herself, and had no eyes but for Thee and me – for Thee, from whom she expected consolation and help – for me, whose life her love to Thee and myself made her prefer to her own. And Thou wert pleased to make the exchange – leaving me among mortals to serve Thee and the church militant, but enrolling her, to Thy eternal glory, among the immortals of the church triumphant. Thou hast delivered her soul from anguish and death, her eyes from tears, and her feet from falling, and now she walks before Thee in the land of life. Dear was she to me, as Thou knowest, above all things in or of this world, the sun and joy of my house. What more should Thy servant say? Lord, Thou seest how my heart fills at this remembrance, and how it melts me into tears. And yet why should I weep for one from whose eyes all tears have been wiped away? Why mourn for her who shall mourn no more? Why sigh for a saint who has left behind her in this world a blessed and holy memorial, and is now amid the choirs of angels, singing the new song with Thine elect, and exulting in Thy salvation? I have lost a jewel in time, but I know it is kept in heaven, and I hope to recover it there, and to lose it no more forever.

It was amidst these and other crosses that the following meditations sprang up, and made their appearance, like flowers beneath a thorny hedge. If they possess any scent of life, any power of Thy Spirit, any of the honey of Thy goodness, which believing souls, like hungry bees, assiduously seek, to Thee, Father! and to the dear Cross, be all the thanks. At Thy feet I now humbly lay this bunch of flowers of affliction, asking of Thee one only boon, which is, that Thou wilt now and forever be my gracious God and Father. For whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire beside Thee.

Thy servant forever,

CHRISTIAN SCRIVER.

Magdeburg, 16th August, 1671.



# Author's Address to the Reader

CHRISTIAN READER! In the name of the Lord Jesus, I here present to you a collection of devout thoughts, which suggested themselves on various occasions to a fellow-pilgrim, called Gotthold, and which I received from his mouth, and have taken the pains to write down.

For this I desire no other praise save that which it well becomes a Christian preacher and minister of the Word to seek – the praise of faithfully and diligently promoting the glory of his God, and the good of his neighbor.

My object in this book was to make the creatures converse with thee, or rather to expound and interpret their secret language, and, according to my poor ability, show how all kinds of objects, incidents, and events, may be made to remind thee of thy God, and to promote thy comfort and growth in Christianity. We read with wonder how Balaam's ass spoke; it seems to me, however, that the irrational, and even the dumb creatures, all speak to us, from day to day, and from hour to hour, if only we have ears to hear, and hearts to understand them. How otherwise could Job say, "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee: and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee?"<sup>1</sup> or David aver that "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork?"<sup>2</sup>

Long ago it used to be said that there was a nobleman in France, in whose domains all the wood and stone, when split or hewn, bore the owner's coat-of-arms, depicted upon them by nature. I shall not inquire into the truth of the story; but at least it is certain, that the man of piety and observation finds in all the creatures the mark, name, and arms, of his benign and merciful God, and, in these, occasions more fervently to love and praise Him. The Book of Nature – to say the same thing in other words – has many thousand leaves, upon all of which the finger of God has inscribed His goodness, and He scatters them in every place, that we may never want

the opportunity of contemplating the height and depth of His love. Happy the man who reads, and devoutly meditates upon them!

It appears to me as if every morning I beheld for the first time this vast theater of the Divine miracles, the world. Every morning His mercy is new to me. I am never satisfied with beholding the displays of His glory alike in the mighty firmament, the spangled heavens, and other such immense bodies, as in small and humble objects. It happens to me like the hen, who frequently finds a grain of wheat even upon a dunghill.

Let no one imagine that by compositions of this kind I introduce a novelty. No; the devout contemplation of nature, and “Incidental Devotions,” are as old as the world. Even Adam, the first whom the Most High put into the possession of the globe, read upon all its objects the name of His Creator, and, like the bee, tasted the sweetness of His love in every little flower. The Lord Himself set up the rainbow in the clouds for the contemplation of Noah, and brought Abraham abroad in the night, and bade him look to the starry heavens. And, doubtless, it was no superficial glance which the holy patriarchs took of the creation; doubtless they, too, found in it themes for devout reflection of all kinds.

King David, as it appears, composed the forty-second psalm while listening to the lowing of the deer in the wilderness, to which he was forced to flee for shelter and concealment. Even he who was the greatest and most exalted of all teachers, has not only directed us to contemplate the creation, but Himself endeavored from every casual object to reap instruction for His hearers, and, by the things which perish, to acquaint them with the things which endure. As He sat upon a well, He began to speak to the Samaritan woman of the water which springeth up unto eternal life.<sup>3</sup> While walking, as is supposed, out of the city of Jerusalem, He observed the vineyards and clusters by the wayside, and took occasion to compare Himself to a vine. His heavenly Father to the husbandman, and His followers to the branches.<sup>4</sup> On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He saw the Jews drawing water from the fountain of Siloam, and began to testify to them once more of spiritual and living water; and, being invited to a feast, He embraced the opportunity to discourse of the great Gospel Supper.<sup>5</sup> In the same way, the Apostle Paul took the hint from the altar of the Athenians to preach of the one living and true God.

In subsequent and even more recent times, many able, pious, and learned divines have trodden in the footsteps of those forerunners, as might be exemplified by instances, were it not superfluous.

No one surely will censure the attempt to prevent evil thoughts, and supply their place by promoting, on every occasion, serious and devout reflection upon God and divine things. My hope at least is, that the reader of this book, when he afterwards meets with any of the objects here made the theme of meditation, will recall one or more of the thoughts. Perhaps, too, even the preacher may learn from it, when in company, or at a feast, in his walks, or on his travels, how to entertain those around him with the same kind of pleasant, and yet profitable discourse, and so help to make them better Christians. He has but to erect his pulpit, as I have done, wherever necessity or duty demands, remembering that it is possible to speak the truth to every one in particular without, as well as within, the walls of a church; but that this must be done with discretion as well as piety, if what he says and teaches is to have the right flavor. When medicine is to be taken by a sickly infant, the best way is to give it first to the nurse, from whom the child imbibes it insensibly with her milk. This duty of the nurse the preacher must often perform, and convert into milk the medicines he prescribes; I mean he must administer them in an agreeable form and courteous way, in the right season, and at the proper time.

My intentions at least were good, and though the success may not in every case correspond with the pious reader's wish, he will yet take the will for the deed, as becomes a Christian, and out of his own fullness supply my lack. The Lord bless and prosper all the good and well-intentioned labors of his faithful ministers, and grant that they may prove neither fruitless nor unrequited!

M. CHRISTIAN SCRIVER.

Magdeburg, 1671.

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1. Job 12:7-8↩
  2. Psalm 19:1↩

3. 1 John 4:6, etc.↔
4. 2 John 15:1, etc.↔
5. Luke 14:16.↔

# 1. The Dial-Plate

Gotthold, on the first morning of a new year, wishing to know the time of day, looked up to the dial of the church spire, where hands, moved by the mechanism within, indicated the hours upon a broad line of gilded numbers. Led into devout reflection, he observed to those around him: I highly approve of marking the hours with letters of gold; it may well admonish us of the value of time, which is indeed too precious to be purchased even with the chief of metals; and of this truth many and all of us need to be reminded. Chrysauros, a man of rank and fortune, had lived an ungodly life; when his end drew near, he beheld a troop of dreadful demons standing around his bed, and waiting for his soul, and exclaimed with a voice of anguish, Oh for time! Only till tomorrow! Spare me till tomorrow! But his entreaties were vain. For him time was past, and the respite terminated. Ah! how much he would have given for even a few hours in which to repent! And yet how seldom we reflect upon the value of time, and how prodigally we spend it! How large the portions of it which we sleep, play, talk, eat, drink, riot away, and, in short, unprofitably waste; and how long we deem the little fragments devoted to spiritual exercises, such as converse with God, the study of His Word, devout contemplation, and the search of conscience! The hand upon the dial moves incessantly round, and passing hour after hour, will point at last to that at which you and I shall die; and it will be said of us. He has departed this life. We shall then have done with time, have entered upon eternity, and shall stand before the Judge. Let us therefore diligently improve every hour, and permit none to pass without yielding us some advantage for the world to come. Let every stroke of the clock remind us that another portion of time is gone, and that we shall have to give account of it to God. "While we have time, let us do good."

My God! seal these words upon my heart, and help me to employ the year which is now commencing in a way I may never repent of in eternity.

## 2. The Snowball

One mild winter day, some boys had made a snowball, and rolled it along until it had grown too large and heavy for them to move. Here, said Gotthold, we have an agreeable emblem of human cares. These are often little and insignificant, but we magnify them by impatience and unbelief, till they become greater than we can bear. Many a one keeps, night and day, revolving his trouble in his mind to no better purpose than these boys. All they accomplish by their pains is to set up for those who pass a sign that children have been at play, and he gains nothing by his but a head more confused, and a heart more sorrowful than before. We are often reluctant to give God the honor of caring for us, and, as if He were drowsy or negligent, offer to assist His wisdom by our folly. But we thereby lose rather than gain. Besides, what a high offence it is, if, when He opens the bosom of His compassion, and bids us boldly cast all our cares into it, we treat Him with distrust!

My God! Thou hast formed the eye and shall Thou not see? Thou hast planted the ear and shalt Thou not hear? Thou hast made the heart, and shalt Thou not take thought? I will roll my trouble no farther than to Thee, or, if that be beyond my might, I will admit Thee into my heart, and show Thee there what is too heavy for me. Thou wilt then know, though I may not, by what means it may be removed.

## 3. The Cold

A child had continued at play in the open air till its hands became livid with cold. At length it rushed into the house, and holding them to the fire, experienced acute pain, which is the usual consequence of subjecting benumbed limbs suddenly to the influence of heat. Gotthold pitied the little fellow, and then remarked: Many and bitter are the pains which prey upon

the human body in this world! There are headache, toothache, earache, and aches in every limb, more numerous than can be told. If, however, even in time, and for man's correction, a righteous God subjects him to sufferings so great, what must be the case in hell, when He pours upon the reprobate the full measure of His wrath? In the present instance, we see, the pain proceeds from the conflict of heat with cold; and so it will be in hell. The victims there will burn in everlasting flames, and at the same time wail and chatter with their teeth. Nor can there be any comparison between the brief anguish of this child, and the torment which shall endure for ever! But so intent are children upon their play, that they neither feel the present cold, nor fear the future pain; and we who are older act a similar part. We pursue the folly of the world, permit ourselves to be beguiled by its paltry pleasures, and all too easily forget the penalties which follow sin, both in time and eternity.

Ah, my God! subject me to any amount of torment in the present life, that will exempt me from the pains of hell hereafter!

## 4. Snow

Here was a deep covering of snow upon the ground, when Gotthold thus began: Snow is one of those marvelous things which God brings forth from the treasures of nature; and no satisfactory account has yet been given of the manner of its production, or of the fantastic shapes which its minute particles assume; although able men have made it the subject of long and careful study, many of them in fact, till the whiteness of their heads attests how often they have seen it fall. This, however, is certain, that God uses it according to His pleasure, sometimes for the good of man, and sometimes to his temporal detriment, or even bodily destruction. Cold although it be, it must, at His behest, serve as a fur to cover and protect the winter's seed. In this sense, the royal prophet says, "The Lord giveth snow like wool;" and country people predict a fruitful season when the White Goose hatches a numerous brood. Rubbed, too, upon frozen limbs, it restores them to warmth and

animation. On the other hand, how destructive it becomes when it receives its commission from the Divine wrath! In mountainous regions, as we sometimes hear, a mere flake, stirred at first by the touch of a bird's wing, or other accidental cause, grows to such a magnitude, as it tumbles from the heights, that on reaching the valley, it crushes and entombs the abodes of men, and even whole villages and towns. How often, too, do we read of the floods and calamities which ensue in Spring, when the snow of the mountains, suddenly dissolved by the rain or heat, rushes down and swells the brooks and rivers till they overflow their banks!

Lord God! all depends upon Thy favor or frown. Thou canst make that which is cold itself a protection from cold, and even a means of generating heat. Baneful things cease to be baneful when overruled by Thy grace. The most useful lose their utility if Thou withhold Thy good influence; and in Thy hand the most minute may become the instrument of a mighty judgment.

## 5. The Money Scales

An opulent merchant having received a sum of money, was putting the ducats, one by one, into a pair of scales, in order to ascertain that they were not too light. "For my part," said Gotthold, who was present, "I should be more afraid of their being too heavy."

How so?" inquired the merchant.

"Do you not think," rejoined Gotthold, "that money is too heavy when bedewed with the blood of the poor, the sweat of the laborious, and the tears of the widow and the orphan; or when loaded with the curses of those who, by fraud or violence, have been robbed of it? I will hope, however, that there are no pieces of this description in that heap of yours; or rather, I will not fear that there are any. Suffer me, however, without offence, to express the wish that you will always make your conscience your scales, and weigh in it your dollars and ducats to ascertain that they are of proper weight, and



have been honestly acquired. Many a man never learns, until he is struggling with death, how difficult, or rather impossible, it is to force a soul, burdened with unrighteous gain, through the strait gate which leadeth unto life. Take heed, then, that no such gain ever burdens yours. The more he carries, the more the pilgrim sweats and pants as he climbs the steep; and the more the conscience is oppressed with dishonesty and fraud, the harder will the struggle of a deathbed be.”

Oh, my God! withhold from me the wealth to which tears, and sighs, and curses cleave. Better none at all than wealth like that!

## 6. The Drowned Man

The magistrate of a well-known town, accompanied by some acquaintances, had gone on public business to a neighboring village, across a frozen river. On their return in the evening, they did not reflect that the intervening thaw might have softened the ice, and rendered it unsafe; and so, unsuspecting of danger, they proceeded along, the magistrate taking the lead, conversing with his companions, and expecting soon to reach the opposite bank. Alas! the shore he reached was that of death! Slipping a foot, and the ice breaking, he fell into the water, struggled for a while, and sank, leaving a disconsolate widow and several helpless children to mourn his fate. Weeks elapsed before his body was found.

Here, said Gotthold, when he heard the story, we have another instance, which may serve as a mirror to show us what we are. Children of men, alas! what is your life but a soft and slippery sheet of ice, which breaks, now here, now there, and plunges you, one after another, into the flood of death and oblivion. This you see, but do not take to heart; and you pace heedlessly along, although at every step the ice bends beneath your feet, till in a moment you disappear. Wherefore, be at all times ready; and while life lasts, prepare a refuge for your soul, that if suddenly called upon to depart, it may know whither to fly.

Lord God! be not angry with me. Behold, I take upon me to speak unto Thee, although I am but dust and ashes.<sup>1</sup> Surprise me not by a sudden death, lest it find me unprepared; neither keep me too long in the mortal struggle, that my patience do not fail. But I will be dumb and hold my peace, for Thou wilt order it aright.<sup>2</sup>

## 7. The Two Mirrors

A young lady, otherwise well-behaved and esteemed, made an idol of the beauty which she had received from nature, and often labored by ornaments to improve it. For this purpose, she had two mirrors in her chamber, placed opposite to each other, so that when she stood between them, she could see her figure behind as well as before; the one at her back reflecting the image into the one in front, and there presenting it to her view. Gotthold saw this with some surprise at the ingenuity of the device. At the same time he said: Are you aware that beauty when unadorned and left to its own native loveliness, is often more admired than that which paint and ornament have been used to set off? The rose is of itself beautiful and fragrant; sprinkle it with balm, and you will injure its innate perfume. Over-anxiety to be beautiful is to be half-ugly. Be moderate, therefore, and delight not too greatly in the verdant gourd of your comeliness, lest God prepare a worm to smite it that it wither. I will, however, recommend to you two other mirrors, in which you may contemplate yourself with profit, – the one is the Past, the other the Future. That will show you how great the mercies you have, all your life long, received from God, and how small the returns of gratitude you have made him; this will exhibit the various changes which still await you, viz., pale sickness, sorrowful old age, certain death, and at last the terrors of judgment. Or would you prefer two other mirrors? In that case, set up continually before your eyes the Divine Justice, which sees all things, even our most secret thoughts, and will, in due time, bring them to judgment; this will guard you against pride and security. On the other hand, look also at the Divine Mercy which incessantly follows after the sinner, and consumes his transgressions in the flame of love; this will keep you from

despondency and excess of sorrow. Such an employment will be as much more profitable than that in which you are now engaged, as the immortal soul is nobler than the vile body.

## 8. The Sensible Wife

Recollect, proceeded Gotthold, having been told the following story: A prudent and pious lady observing her husband deeply dejected on account of some misfortune which had befallen him, so that he could not sleep at night for care, pretended in the morning to be still more disconsolate than he, and gave way to lamentations and tears. As she had spoken cheerfully to him the evening before, and exhorted him to dismiss his sorrow, he was astonished, and asked the cause of her sudden grief. Hesitating a little, she replied that she had been dreaming, and that it seemed to her that a messenger had come from heaven, and brought the news that God was dead, and that all the angels were weeping. "Foolish woman," said the husband, "you know right well that God cannot die!" – "Indeed," replied the wife, "and if that be so certain, how comes it that you are now indulging your sorrow as immoderately as if he really did no longer exist, or, at least, as if He was unable to set measure and bounds to our affliction, or mitigate its severity, or convert it into a blessing. My dear husband, learn to trust in Him, and to sorrow like a Christian. Think of the old proverb," "What need to grieve, If God still live."

Verily, my Father, didst Thou not live, I would not myself wish to live another hour! And if sometimes Thou feignest to be dead, I will not cease to rouse Thee with my prayers and tears, until I sensibly experience again that Thou art the health of my countenance, and my God.

## 9. The Poverty of the Children of the Rich

This happened one day to be the subject of conversation in a company, and almost all who were present had instances of it to relate. On inquiring into its causes, some maintained that it was owing to the foolish love of wealthy parents, who trained their children in youth more to luxury than labor, more to wasting than thrift, and thus made them bad economists. Others supposed the cause to be, that great wealth is seldom amassed by one man, except at the expense of many others, and without the tears of widows, and the sweat of the poor, – in short, without injustice; and that for that reason the curse of God cleaves to it, and fritters it away. To these views Gotthold did not object, aware, in particular cases, of their truth. He insisted, however, that to the children of the rich, poverty is a secret blessing, inasmuch as it takes from them the key which opens all the doors of sin; or, in other words, wealth. Nurtured, he said, as they have been, in superfluity and self-indulgence of all kinds, in total ignorance of the cross, and insensibility to the hardships and miseries of others, they would, if left in this state, care little or nothing for heaven. God, therefore, permits their temporal possessions to melt away, that they may thereby be led to despise earthly things, and seek, with all the greater ardor, those that are heavenly.

God! vouchsafe to my children Thy enduring grace, and even in the midst of poverty, they will then be rich enough.

## 10. The Open Smelling-Bottle

For some purpose, Gotthold had taken from a cupboard a vial of rose-water, and, after using it, had inconsiderately left it unstopped. Observing it some time after, he found that all the strength and sweetness of the perfume

had evaporated. This, thought he with himself, is a striking emblem of a heart fond of the world, and open to the impressions of outward objects. How vain it is to take such a heart to the house of God, and fill it with the precious essence of the roses of paradise, which are the truths of Scripture, or raise in it a glow of devotion, if we afterwards neglect to close the outlet, – that is, to keep the Word in an honest and good heart!<sup>3</sup> How vain to hear much, but to retain little and practice less! How vain to excite in our heart sacred and holy emotions, unless we are afterwards careful to close the outlet by diligent reflection and prayer, and so preserve it unspotted from the world. Neglect this, and the strength and spirit of devotion evaporates, and leaves only a lifeless froth behind.

Lord Jesus, enable me to keep Thy word like a lively cordial in my heart. Quicken it there by Thy Spirit and grace. Seal it, also, in my soul, that it may preserve for ever its freshness and its power!

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1. Gen. 18:27.↩
  2. Psalm 39:2.↩
  3. Luke 8:15.↩

## 11. The Diamond

Gotthold, inspecting the operations of a goldsmith, who was setting a diamond, saw him place a dark leaf in the capsule, which it was intended to fill. On inquiring for what purpose this was done, he was told that it improved the brightness and sparkling of the jewel. Reflecting upon the matter, he found that such would naturally be the effect, and exclaimed: My God, here I have a type of Thy grace, which shines most brightly and beautifully in our deepest distress, or when employed to overlay the blackness of our guilt. I do not wonder so much that it irradiated an Enoch, a Noah, a Daniel, and a Virgin Mary, as that it shed its enlightening and quickening rays on David the adulterer, on Peter, who denied his Master with an oath, on Paul the persecutor and blasphemer, and on that great sinner Mary Magdalene.

## 12. The Church Spires

Seeing, in a certain town, the church spires mounting almost to the clouds, Gotthold began to wonder that our forefathers had expended so much industry and wealth upon an object which seems to minister to nothing but superfluous pomp and outward show. After some reflection, however, he remarked, that their intentions were no doubt good, and their object praiseworthy. Does not such a tall and stately spire seem like a giant figure pointing upwards! There can be no doubt, our worthy ancestors meant that every church should direct our eyes to heaven, and thereby admonish us that the doctrine preached in the sanctuary below, is the only way to the

mansions above. As often, then, as we see such a spire, let us recollect that here we have no continuing city but must seek one to come.<sup>1</sup>

## 13. The Mote in the Eye

While at play, a child happening to get a mote into his eye, kept rubbing it for a while, but with no other effect than to increase the pain and inflammation. At last he ran and complained to his father, who put a small pearl into it, and bade him close and roll it about several times, whereupon the pearl dropped out with the mote adhering to it. This suggested to Gotthold the following thoughts: The eye is the light of the body. It sees all things presented to it, but not itself. It is, however, as the present instance shows, an extremely sensitive organ, and cannot endure even a mote, but weeps and aches until it is relieved. It thus affords us a true emblem of conscience, which, although itself little noticed, perceives, apprehends, and, so to speak, keeps a record of all things. In one respect, indeed, conscience is superior to the eye; for while the latter sees only by day, the former sees also by night, and takes minute cognizance of the works of darkness. Now, true it is that many, especially when blinded by the delusions of self-love and carnal security, look upon sin as only a mote. But ah! with what bitter pain and anguish the mote, which seems so small, can wring the conscience! How it aches and weeps! And, in such a case, God of mercy, there is no help but with Thee. The Gospel of Jesus is the pearl of great price. Dropped by Thy hand into the wounded and troubled heart, it takes sin and all its anguish away, so that we find rest to our souls, and learn to serve Thee with alacrity and delight.

Help me, my God! to walk at all times cautiously and circumspectly, and guard me by Thy grace from ever wounding my conscience.

## 14. The Lock

A lock was shown to Gotthold, constructed of rings, which were severally inscribed with certain letters, and could be turned round until the letters represented the name Jesus. It was only when the rings were disposed in this manner that the lock could be opened. The invention pleased him beyond measure and he exclaimed: Oh that I could put such a lock as this upon my heart!<sup>2</sup> Our hearts are already locked, no doubt, but generally with a lock of quite another kind. Many need only to hear the words, Gain, Honor, Pleasure, Riches, Revenge and their heart opens in a moment, whereas, to the Savior and to His holy name, it continues shut.

Lord Jesus, engrave Thou Thy name with Thine own finger upon my heart, that it may remain closed to worldly joy and worldly pleasure, self-interest, fading honor, and low revenge, and open only to Thee!

## 15. The Golden Candlestick

Gotthold proceeded: Among the furniture of the tabernacle, under the Old Testament, not the least conspicuous article was the golden candlestick, with seven branches and lamps that always burned. By the Divine command, however, this candlestick was neither cast nor soldered together, but made of beaten work from a talent of gold<sup>3</sup>. In this way the Lord intended to signify that no one can shine on earth with the light of sound doctrine and a holy life, or in heaven with eternal glory, who has not been subjected to His hammer, and beaten and wrought conformably to His mind. The only misfortune is, that we do not comprehend His method of working. Thy will, God, is to make of us vessels unto honor, sanctified and meet for Thy use, and prepared unto every good work.<sup>4</sup> We, however, would rather continue good for nothing, than subject our sinful flesh to pain. But, my Father, heed not our folly. The hammers Thou usest are the devil, the world, and all sorts of adversity. Beat well, that both here in time, and hereafter in eternity, I may be a vessel unto honor, and fit for Thy use.



## 16. The Drinking Cup

A silver cup, gilded and tastefully embossed, was standing upon a table, and suggested to Gotthold the following thoughts: The sole difference between this and any other piece of silver is, that it has been more highly wrought, and beaten with the hammer. In no other way could it have been formed into the costly and beautiful vessel which we here see. Why then should we think it so strange and unaccountable when God, in His unerring wisdom, applies to us, in good earnest, the hammer of the Cross? Do not we deal as we please with the inanimate creatures, molding them into any shape which strikes our fancy? And ought we, then, to take offence, and complain of Him, when He makes the Cross His hammer, and beats us into conformity to His will? Is our right over the creatures better than His over us? And would any good thing come out of us were our gracious Father to let us alone?

## 17. The Monk in Solitude

Recollect, said Gotthold, a pleasant story, told by a pious minister, about a monk of former days. He resolved to leave his monastery, on the ground that he there too frequently met with causes of provocation, and was betrayed into anger and other sins. Accordingly he retired into the desert, in the hope that solitude would enable him to serve God with an easier mind. One day, however, his pitcher happened to be upset, and, when lifted up, fell a second time, which kindled his anger to such a pitch, that he dashed it to the ground, and broke it into a thousand pieces. He soon, however, came to himself, and said: I now see that I cannot be at peace, even in solitude, and that the fault lies not in others, but in myself. He then returned to the monastery, and, after many strenuous efforts, succeeded in subduing his passions, not by flight, but by mortification and self-denial.

## 18. The Unknown Friend

One day a person who, by the calamities of war, sickness, and other affliction, had been reduced from a state of affluence to penury, came to Gotthold in great distress. He complained that he had just met one of his former acquaintances, who was even not distantly related to him, but that he had not condescended to bow, far less to speak to him, and had turned his eyes away, and passed him as if he had been a stranger. Oh, Sir, he exclaimed, with a sigh. How it pained me! I felt as if a dagger had pierced my heart! Gotthold replied: Don't think it strange at all. It is the way of the world to look high, and to pass unnoticed that which is humble and lowly.

I know, however, of One who, though he dwelleth on high, humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth<sup>5</sup>, and of whom the royal prophet testifies: Thou hast known my soul in adversity<sup>6</sup>. Oh yes, though we have lost our rich attire, and come to him in rags; though our forms be wasted because of grief, and waxed old<sup>7</sup>; though sickness and sorrow hath consumed our beauty like a moth<sup>8</sup>; though blushes, and tears, and dust overspread our faces<sup>9</sup>, He still recognizes, and is not ashamed to own us. Comfort yourself with this; for what harm will it do you at last, though men disown, if God the Lord has not forgotten you?

## 19. The Copy-Line

In a writing-school, Gotthold observed a boy eyeing attentively the line placed before him as a copy, and laboring by his penmanship to emulate its correctness and beauty. Mark, said he to the by-standers, how all perfection is the offspring of imperfection, and how, by frequent mistakes, we learn to do well. It is not required of this boy that his writing should equal that of the line. He satisfies his master by the pains he takes, and which are a ground of hope that he will progressively improve, till at last he learns to

write with rapidity and elegance. We also have a pattern to copy. It has been left us by the Lord Jesus<sup>10</sup>, and is His most perfect and holy life. And think not that He exacts from us more than the teacher does from the pupil. No, indeed; if He find us careful in studying His example, and diligent in our endeavors to imitate it, He exercises forbearance towards our faults, and strengthens us by His grace and Spirit daily, to amend. In the school of Christ they are the best scholars who continue learning to the last; I mean they who sedulously keep their Master's example in view, and are always striving to grow more and more like it, but yet are never satisfied with themselves, or with the progress which they make. We must, therefore, endeavor to avoid two faults, which are negligence and discouragement. The one becomes eventually the parent of indolence and security; the other of despondency and grief. Heaven is open, not merely to the perfect and strong, but likewise to the feeble and erring, if they will only with penitence and humility confess their faults, and seek in the grace of Christ the supply for all their wants.

My God! despise not my inability. Remember I am but a learner and be satisfied with my poor performances. My good intentions often miscarry. But ought I on that account to desist? God forbid! So long as I live, I will always begin afresh, and in heaven, at Thy good time, will lay my masterpiece at thy feet.

## 20. Dancing

We are told, said Gotthold, of one of the fathers of the desert, that seeing a female of loose morals arrayed in rich apparel, he was moved to tears, and lamented that he had never taken half so much pains to adorn his soul with faith and godliness, as she to please the world. And I, too, my God, could almost weep to think that I have been far less diligent to conform my walk and ways to Thy precepts and will, than these dancers are to make their feet keep time to the music. How infatuated are men! Mere vanities appear to us worth the greatest pains. But seldom and only with reluctance do we reflect

upon eternity. Away with folly! I have so much to do, to mend my heart and prepare for death, that I have no time to think of dancing.

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1. Hebrews 13:14.↵
2. Matt. 13:46.↵
3. Exodus 25:31.↵
4. 2 Timothy ii. 21.↵
5. Psalm 113:5, 6.↵
6. Psalm 31:7.↵
7. Psalm 6:7, Luth. ver.↵
8. Psalm 39:11.↵
9. Psalm 69:7↵
10. 1 Peter 2:21.↵

## 21. The Watchmaker

Engaged in conversation with a friend, who had remarked that he was often at a loss to discover any traces of the Divine government and providence in the affairs of the world, Gotthold said to him, Come, let us go to a watchmaker's. See, he has been making a valuable watch of a number of wheels, springs, pins, etc., exactly measured, jointed, and fitted to each other. There lie the parts, all different in shape, size, and construction, and all having a certain order and place to which they belong. Do you think that you could put them together, and arrange them into one? I very much doubt your ability. Make the attempt; expend upon it as much time and trouble as you please, the only result will be to convince you of the impossibility of constructing a whole from parts so dissimilar. Call an artist however, to the task, and you will soon see what skill can do. It is the same here. God has ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight. He has adapted cause to cause, allotted to all His creatures their definite action, and finally, appended the weight of His omnipotence and wisdom to the whole fabric. Keep this in view when you wish to know what hour has struck.

My God! I thank Thee that Thy watchful eye is over all things, and that Thou governest them with mercy and wisdom. I thank Thee that the world goes not as man wills, but as Thou the Lord wilt. In whom can I trust better than in Thee? How strangely soever, then, the world's affairs may sometimes seem to proceed, I will be dumb, and not open my mouth, because Thou doest it.

## 22. The Blushing Child

A young girl was one day censured by her mother for some fault, upon which she deeply blushed, burst into tears, and retired into a corner. Gotthold was present, and observed to the mother: How beautiful your reproof has made your daughter! That crimson hue, and those silvery tears, become her better than any ornament of gold and pearls. These may be hung on the neck of a wanton, but those are never seen disconnected with moral purity. A full-blown rose, besprinkled with the purest dew, is not so beautiful as this child blushing beneath her parent's displeasure, and shedding tears of sorrow for her fault. A blush is the sign which nature hangs out to show where chastity and honor dwell.

## **23. Mutual Aid**

Continuing his remarks, Gotthold said:

How faithful to each other the parts of the body are! Let any offensive and shameful object be presented to the countenance, and the heart instantly sympathizes with it, and dispatches a gush of blood to serve as a veil and to screen it from disgrace. On the contrary, let the heart receive a shock from violent anger, or sudden fright, and instantly the blood forsakes the countenance, and rushes to the help of the suffering member; the consequence of which is that we grow pale. Christians ought to act in the same manner, seeing that we are members one of another. In every case where the means are in our power, and conscience permits, we should endeavor to screen our neighbor's shame, take his affliction to heart, and hasten in emergencies to his aid. From the fact that this is so little done, it may be inferred that good Christians are few in number. Of that few, grant, my Father, that I may be one!

## **24. Raiment**

While walking with a friend, Gotthold met a young man, dressed in the extreme of fashion, and could not help looking back at him, and exclaiming, with a sigh: righteous God! what will be the issue of this rage for novelties and vain show? How happens it that the world more and more seeks her honor in disgrace, and her wisdom in folly? I often think of what the Holy Spirit says<sup>1</sup> of Queen Bernice, viz., that she came “with great pomp” (orig. phantasy). The reigning fashion seems to me to be of the same phantastic character. There is hardly any one who now considers it a sin to wear a mask, and conform to the world.

But, inquired his companion, can there really be so much sinfulness in the changes which dress undergoes?

In itself, replied Gotthold, dress belongs to the class of things neutral. It makes a man neither better nor worse in the sight of God, it draws upon him neither the Almighty’s favor nor frown; still the coat shows what the man and what his heart is. Can you doubt that many a one, in his gay attire, cut according to the newest style, is an idol to himself? With what pomp and pride he struts along, and fancies that none makes so fine a figure. Though one bow ever so soon or so humbly to him, yet he, on the contrary, scarcely deigns to return the salutation. In this way, the old man, whom we are bound to crucify with his affections and lusts,<sup>2</sup> is warmly clothed, expensively ornamented, and idolatrously revered. The money given to supply the wants of a needy brother, is wastefully squandered, and the word of God in the heart choked among thorns. He whose frame of mind is such that he is always lying abased at the feet of the Omnipotent, – he who does not despise a Christian neighbor, though in poverty and rags, – he who is ready at any hour, in obedience to the will of God, to exchange the finest suit for the beggar’s cloak or the death-bed shroud, may, perhaps, without sin, wear costly raiment. But how the children of the world, with their swelling pomp, shall contrive to enter in at the strait gate which leadeth unto life, must be left for them to try, if they will have it so.

My God! naked came I into this world, and naked must I again depart out of it. While my life lasts, give me food and raiment convenient for me. If my rank or office require a better dress, disengage, at least, my heart from it, and make me unconscious of what I wear. My soul desires ornaments of a different kind. Let the blood and righteousness of Christ be my badge and role of honor.

## 25 – The Milky Way

One starry night, as he stood gazing at what is called the milky way, Gotthold thought with himself: This white belt in the heavens, as one of the ancients has said, and as has now been demonstrated, is formed by the shining of innumerable stars, too distant from us to be perceptible, except through the medium of the telescope. To me it presents, first of all, an emblem of holy Scripture, which, to him who views it superficially, appears obscure and dim; whereas he who contemplates it in spirit, and through the perspective of faith, discovers a thousand sparkling stars of doctrine and consolation. Again, the milky way also reminds me of the glorious assembly of the saints in the life eternal. Of this, in our natural condition, we know nothing. But if we take the glass of faith and Divine contemplation, we then discover that verily the spirits of the blessed shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.<sup>3</sup> And yet all about the heavenly world appears small and scarcely perceptible, because we are still at so great a distance from it. If, however, by the will of God, we one day reach that blessed place, then shall we fully know what it is, and be forever satisfied.

## 26. The Magnet

You may shake or push the magnetic needle from its position, continued Gotthold, but it returns to it the moment you leave it to itself.

In like manner, believers may fall into sin, and deviate from the line of duty; but no sooner have they leisure for reflection, than they endeavor to amend, and resume a life of godliness. On the contrary, the wicked watch for opportunities to do evil, and yield to all the temptations of the devil and the world.



## 27. Hans Priem

Our worthy forefathers, said Gotthold, have left us a tale in verse, of which the purpose is to show how difficult, and yet how necessary it is sometimes to keep silence. The substance of the story is as follows: Hans Priem was admitted into paradise on the express condition that he was not to indulge a habit he had acquired of censuring and criticizing whatever came under his notice. Accordingly, he saw two angels carrying a beam crossways, and knocking it against every object they met, but said nothing. He next saw two other angels drawing water from a fountain, and pouring it into a cask which had holes in the bottom, and was much surprised, but still held his peace. At many other things of the same kind he also suppressed his laughter and remarks, apprehending that he might otherwise be expelled the place. At last, however, he saw a cart stuck fast in the mire, with one pair of horses yoked into it before, and another pair behind, and the carter urging both simultaneously forward. This being a matter which belonged to his own profession, it was more than Hans could do to refrain from criticizing it, and the consequence was, that he was seized by two angels, and turned to the door. Before it closed behind him, however, he looked back, and perceived that the horses were winged, and had succeeded in drawing the cart out of the mud into the air: nor can there be any doubt that in the other cases of the beam and the cask, there were equally good reasons for what was done.

Wherefore, let us learn to hold our peace, and refrain from censuring the ways of God. But where am I running? In praising silence, I have become loquacious! My God! do Thou Thyself instruct me when to speak and when to hold my tongue.

## 28. The Fruit Trees

In a company of friends, assembled in an orchard, the question arose, whether it was better to prune the under branches of the young trees, and so rear them straight and tall, or suffer them to extend in breadth? The majority were of opinion till at the former was the preferable method, because the tall and straight tree occupies less space in the garden, and yet bears finer and more highly flavored fruit. On the other hand, it was remarked, that such a tree, with the crop it bears, is at the mercy of the wind, which often prematurely shakes it, and scatters the fruit, long ere it is ripe, upon the ground. Gotthold heard the conversation, and said: The way to settle this dispute is to leave every one to do in the matter as he thinks best, and as is best adapted to the extent of his ground. Let me, however, embrace the opportunity of directing your minds to the question, Whether, for the godly and virtuous man, it be more desirable to live in a humble rank, or to aspire after a higher position? It is true that he who is exalted above others by a post of honor, and who yet adorns his lofty boughs with fruits of godliness and virtue, while he also bends them with humility to the ground, is a tree in which both God and man delight, and whose fruit has the richer flavor the higher it grows. At the same time, it is a fact to be deplored, that a faint wind often agitates the lofty tree, by which I mean that the man of rank is exposed to many inducements to shake off the fruits of godliness, and is too often found a barren stock. On the other hand, serious defects are also prevalent among persons of a humble station, as, for example, that they stretch the arms of greed and selfishness around them further than they ought, or in other ways deport themselves in an unseemly manner, and thereby bring condemnation on their fruit. St. Paul tells us this when he says: As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.<sup>4</sup> It is right that he whom God hath highly exalted should aspire after high things, and none are higher than those which are heavenly and divine. But let him whom the Most High has placed in a low estate comfort himself with the thought, that godly humility is the shortest way to true greatness. All who are filled with the fruits of righteousness unto His glory<sup>5</sup> are dear to God, whether they be high or low.

My God! make me, though a lowly, yet a fruitful tree. In this world I cannot reach my proper height; but when transplanted by Thee into Thy celestial garden, I shall flourish and grow forever.

## 29. Going to Church

See, said Gotthold to his family, as they were setting out for church, that none of you forget himself, and leave the true church at home. The true church is a devout heart, anxious both to learn and to do the will of God, and unless you take it along with you, you may as well stay at home. The pictures, pillars, seats, and benches, have been in the church for many a year, yet still continue lifeless things. You, however, are rational men, nay, more, baptized Christians; you have ears to hear, and a heart to understand God's Word, and unless you use your ears and hearts, going to church will do you no good. Nay, on the great day of judgment, there will be many for whom it would have been better never to have had the opportunity of entering a church door, than to have frequently gone to it, but just as often returned from it without fruit or improvement. On that day, it will be more tolerable for those who did not know the Word of God, than for those who possessed it abundantly, and heard it often, but did not act according to it. Must the fig-tree which, in its natural state, bore no fruit, be hewn down? Then, surely, much more that which, after all the pains of the husbandman, remains unprofitable still.<sup>6</sup> After they had set out, Gotthold sighed, and said: Oh! Lord Jesus, beloved Savior, there are many churches upon the earth, but few hearts that are churches to Thee. Here, however, is my heart; here the hearts of all my family; take, and occupy them; sanctify them by Thy Spirit; sprinkle them with Thy righteousness; drive from them Satan and all wickedness; fill them with Thy grace; protect them by Thy power; refresh them with Thy consolations; uphold them unto salvation by Thy strength, and so make them, both in time and eternity, Thy sanctuary and dwelling-place.

## 30. The Notebook

Having one day purchased a few note-books, Gotthold took occasion to say to a friend who was with him: This reminds me of the words of a great and enlightened statesman, who, being asked by a young gentleman what treatise on the art of government he could recommend as the best, replied; A book of white paper. Take such a book, journey with it through the world, carefully attend to every matter, whether political or not, which appears to you remarkable, note it for the information of yourself and others, and in this way you will make an excellent work, from which you may learn much. The sagacious man, it appears, preferred experience and observation to all other books. And why should not I entertain the same opinion on spiritual matters? I do believe, that were a person, from his earliest infancy, to note and register all the Divine blessings, and all the miracles of goodness and severity which, in the course of his life, he observed and experienced, he would compose an excellent and most useful book; Nothing could be more edifying than to be reminded, by its perusal, how wonderfully, and yet how graciously we had been led, and how effectually comforted by God, and how various the ways, and abundant the measures, in which His fatherly love, truth, long-suffering, care, and goodness, had been manifested towards us! For my own part, were I circumstantially to record all the mercy which He has made to pass before me, the narrative would fill many volumes.

Well then, my God, I have learned from experience that my God Thou truly art. So numerous are the proofs I have had of Thy fatherly care and faithfulness, that were I to fail in reliance upon Thee, it would be the height of injustice.

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1. Acts 25:23.↩
  2. Galatians 5:24.↩
  3. Daniel 12:3.↩
  4. 1 Corinthians 7:17.↩
  5. Philippians 1:11.↩
  6. Luke 13:7 – 9.↩

## 31. The Post

Gotthold happening to receive a letter brought by the post in a very few days from a somewhat distant place, a person who was present observed: How useful an institution the post is, by which we are enabled in so short a time to hear from, and hold intercourse with, our distant friends. Gotthold replied: It is a just remark. The posts are now everywhere well-appointed, and there are few places not provided with them. But what edifying thoughts are they fitted to suggest? There can be little doubt that covetousness and curiosity are the two steeds by which most of the mails are drawn. Of that, however, I shall say no more. Let us rather reflect on something which the world in general forgets, viz., that we may, if we please, have a mail to heaven, conveying in a moment intelligence of our condition and concerns, our wants and desires to our God and Father, and bringing back to us a gracious answer, with advice and comfort, protection and help. Blessed be the Father of Mercy, and the God of all consolation, who has not left us destitute of such a means of communication with Himself! Prayer is the swift courier, and sighs the winged messengers. Doves have been trained to fly from place to place, carrying letters in a little casket, fastened to their neck or foot. They are swift of flight, but our prayers and sighs are swifter, for they take but a moment to pass from earth to heaven, and bear the troubles of our heart to the heart of God. These messengers no hostile force can detain; they penetrate the clouds, never linger on the way, and never desist until the Most High attends. A tyrant may shut up a godly man in the deepest dungeon, immure him between massive walls, and forbid him all intercourse with his fellow-men, but these messengers he cannot restrain; in defiance of all obstacles, they report to the Omniscient the affliction of the victim, and bring back to him the Divine consolation.

Oh my Father! I thank Thee for having, despite the devil and the world, vouchsafed to us a channel of communication, and boldness to converse with Thyself Grant unto me that I may at all times use my privilege with fil-

ial reverence and confidence: And by such a post as this, viz., my last sigh, breathed by the strength of Thy Spirit in the name of Jesus, may my soul at length perform its journey from earth to heaven!

## 32. The Sailors

Being one day upon the banks of a river, Gotthold beheld a party of sailors impelling their vessel against the stream. Sometimes fastening their ropes to a tree or post, they towed it forward; at other times, going ashore and harnessing themselves to the ropes, they dragged it after them. Here, said he, I have an emblem of my own voyage to heaven. The world is the mighty stream which sweeps multitudes away into the gulf of perdition. I must stem the torrent with my little bark, being commanded not to be conformed to the world, nor to love either it or its lusts.<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, labor is indispensable. My sighs and yearnings are the ropes, my resolution the post, and my strength is in God and his Spirit. Here I strain every nerve, reaching forth unto those things which are before.<sup>2</sup> Here there must be no pause or relaxation. Were these sailors to intermit their exertions, the stream would soon bear down their vessel to its starting-place. The same thing happens in our Christian experience. If we cease to fight with ourselves and the world, or relax our diligence in prayer, and other holy exercises, we soon become sensible of the backsliding and decline of our inner man.

My God, help me always resolutely to strive, and through life and death, to force my way unto Thee.

## 33. The Bed of Flowers

Gotthold ordered a parterre [ORNAMENTAL FLOWER BED] in his garden to be dressed afresh, and planted with all varieties of bulbs. The work, when finished, suggested to him the following reflections: Although the gardener has exercised his skill upon this plot of ground, and given it a form, which adds greatly to its beauty, nevertheless, like other earth, it still retains the wildness of its nature, and unless carefully kept, would, ere long, be overgrown with weeds. It is the same with the heart of God's children. No doubt they have experienced a blessed regeneration, have become other men, and by the grace, word, and spirit of their heavenly Father, been transformed and renewed in heart. Still the innate sinfulness continues lurking within them, and must daily be kept under, by repentance and prayer, struggles and holy resolutions. They who are sincerely pious, do indeed forsake sin, but sin does not forsake them.

My God, I acknowledge all the grace, and pains, and labor which Thou hast expended on the cultivation of my poor and desert heart. I thank Thee for having traced upon it an outline of genuine godliness, and planted it with holy aspirations and desires, which are the roots of all the virtues. But, my Father, Thou knowest the nature of the soil. Sins still harbor in my bosom; and though, as Thou also knowest, I take pains to extirpate and subdue them, the corrupt principle remains concealed in my flesh, is ever active, and breaks forth where it can. My God, my own care and pains are too slender and weak. Do Thou, therefore, take me and take my poor heart under Thy charge. Extirpate, subdue, restrain sin, and cause the flowers of faith and charity to grow, and increase within me, that my soul may become a garden of delight to Thee.

## 34. The Violet

Having been presented with a bunch of blue violets, Gotthold regaled himself with their delightful fragrance, and thanked God for the manifold kinds of refreshment which He provides for man. He also took occasion to express the following thoughts: This beautiful and odoriferous little flower

may furnish me with a pleasing image of a humble and godly heart. It is a lowly plant, and creeps upon the ground; but, nevertheless, it charms the eye with its celestial blue, and, by its noble perfume, far excels many of its more stately and pompous mates of the garden, such as the tulip and imperial crown. In the same way, there are persons who, to themselves and others, appear base and humble, but who resemble the Lord Jesus in meekness and lowliness of heart. They thus bear the genuine hue of heaven, and are preferred by God to others who parade their spiritual or bodily gifts. The apothecary, too, extracts the juice of this little flower, and, mixing it with melted sugar, produces a cooling and invigorating cordial; and even so the Most High infuses the syrup of His grace into the humble heart, and so makes it the means of comfort and edification to others.

My God! my glory shall be not to seek my own glory, but Thine. I have no wish to be a gaudy flower, if I can only please Thee, and profit my neighbor. Greatness does not consist in the mere possession of lofty gifts, but in using lofty gifts with a humble mind to the praise of the Most High.

## **35. The Cabinet of Curiosities**

In a company of persons of rank, the conversation happening to turn upon the museum of a prince, several who had seen it mentioned various objects, which, partly for the labor expended upon them, partly for their rarity, and partly, likewise, for their great intrinsic value, were held in high estimation. Gotthold remarked as follows: An eminent and pious clergyman, having once inspected a similar cabinet, interrogated his companions, on their way out, which of all the costly objects it contained seemed to them the most excellent and precious. With one accord, and consonant to the opinion of the keeper, who had shown them the cabinet, they fixed upon a piece of jewelry, in which were set many large Oriental diamonds. Whereupon, the clergyman observed: I perceive that you have yet to learn to put a just value on yourselves. Your Savior places the human soul in the balance with the world, and, after weighing them, pronounces the soul to be the



most valuable of the two, saying. What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?<sup>3</sup> There is not one object to be seen in this treasury which was not purchased with gold or silver. The soul, however, is far too valuable to be bought at any such price, and, therefore, the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot and blemish, required to be paid for it.<sup>4</sup> Besides, every object here is of a transitory nature, and subject to vanity. The soul, however, is immortal, and for that reason ought to be justly prized, as the most precious of jewels.

## **36. The Lost Object**

Therefore, proceeded Gotthold, whatever else you may do, I beseech you see that you keep with care the precious jewel of your immortal soul. In these days of ours, means have been devised for searching and recovering lost things out of navigable rivers, and even the tempestuous sea; but who knows how to rescue a lost soul from the abyss of hell? Alas! exclaimed one of the company, this jewel is far from safe, when entrusted to such care as ours; and He who is the keeper of Israel, and neither slumbers nor sleeps,<sup>5</sup> must undertake the larger share of the task. To which Gotthold replied: How true that is!

Lord Jesus, Shepherd and Bishop of my soul! Thou knowest best of any how much a soul is worth. Whatever it may be to a man, a precious jewel it is to Thee, bought at an untold price. And that which is Thine own. Thou wilt know how to keep, that the devil may never steal it away.

## **37. The Lute**

One evening one of a company of friends despatched a servant to his house for his lute, and found that, when brought into the apartment, it had lost tune, as usually happens to these instruments when exposed to changes of weather or atmosphere. While the owner was tightening the strings, Gotthold, who was present, thought with himself: What is sweeter than a well-tuned lute, and what more delightful than a faithful friend – one who can cheer us in sorrow with wise and affectionate discourse! Nothing, however, is sooner un-tuned than a lute; and nothing is more fickle than human friendship. The tone of the one changes with the weather, that of the other with fortune. With a clear sky, a bright sun, and a gentle breeze, you will have friends in plenty; but let fortune frown, and the firmament be overcast, and then your friends will prove like the strings of this lute, of which you will tighten ten before you find one that will bear the tension and keep the pitch.

## **38. Second Meditation on the Lute**

But, proceeded Gotthold, after a pause, why complain of others, when I find a match for the lute within myself? What is my mind, if not an instrument easily put out of tune? In fair weather it rings loud and clear; I mean that when caressed by fortune, it is haughty and insolent, enamored of self, and prone to fancy that all it thinks and contrives is good and pleasing both to God and man. Only, however, let the weather change, and the sun of prosperity dim its beams, and hide behind dark clouds of trouble, and then our courage vanishes; we give ourselves up to despondency, and anxious thoughts make a strange medley within us.

Yes, my God, my mind is indeed variable as a lute, and good for nothing, unless from hour to hour Thou tunest it afresh. Enable me in all weathers decreed for me by Thy providence, to keep the pitch, and may that ever be, Thy will be done.

## 39. The Picture

An opulent man had taken down several fine paintings which adorned the walls of his house, cleaned off the dust with a whisk of feathers and a moist cloth, and then exposed them to the sun, knowing that this is the way to brighten paintings in oil, and renew their original beauty and freshness; whereas watercolor rubs off with the impurities. Gotthold, on being told the matter, observed: Like pictures in water-colors are false Christians, who possess the form of godliness, but deny the power,<sup>6</sup> and may for a time deceive men, because men can see no further than the outward appearance. They are known, however, to God, who tries the heart and the reins, and will be cast by Him into everlasting fire, as unworthy to enter heaven. As for true Christians, whose hearts have been thoroughly penetrated by the oil of the Gospel, and have taken their hue from the blood of Christ, they stand the proof, endure trial, and come more beautiful out of every temptation.

Grant, Lord Jesus, that my Christianity may be well founded and genuine, and that no accident may have power to blot Thine image from my heart!

## 40. The Straight and the Crooked Tree

While Gotthold was one day walking in a wood with a friend, the latter spoke to him with sorrow, of his son, who, he said, was a simple lad, could not be taught manners, understood little of his tasks, and was too shy to speak to a stranger; but yet, in other respects, was of a pious disposition, feared God, took pleasure in prayer, and was obedient to the slightest hint of his parents. Gotthold thereupon directed his attention to two trees, – the one beautiful and straight, and without a branch from the root to the top, which

it had pushed high into the air, and spread out in a graceful circle; the other, with plenty of branches, gnarled and crooked, – and then inquired: If you had the choice of these two trees, which of them would you prefer? Without much reflection, his friend pointed to the straight one, and said: This would be useful for building, and various purposes, whereas the other is so crooked, warped, and knotty, that it is good for nothing. Attempting to manufacture anything out of it would be only wasting tools, and even to split or hew it into fuel for the fire, would be a difficult task. Well, said Gotthold, this straight tree is the emblem of a simple-minded, plain, and honest man, who grows up in unfeigned godliness, feeds his mind with heavenly thoughts, seeks those things that are above, and stretches forth his hands and heart towards God and heaven. Such persons are often chosen by the Most High to be pillars in his temple.<sup>7</sup> That other, however, is the proper image of a subtle, crafty, and intriguing person, who is full of tricks and cunning, knots and branches. Of what use is such a character, unless to trouble himself and others? If he who has little wit needs a master to inform his stupidity, he who has much frequently needs ten to keep in check his worldly wisdom, which might otherwise, like a high-mettled charger, toss him to the ground. It is better to have a son who is simple, good, and pious, than one self-willed, reckless, and sharp at all kinds of villainy.

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1. Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15.↩
  2. Philippians 3:13.↩
  3. Matt. 16:26.↩
  4. 1 Peter 1:18.↩
  5. Psalm 121:4.↩
  6. 2 Timothy 3:5.↩
  7. Rev. 3:12.↩

## 41. The Sun-Dial

Examining the sun-dial, to ascertain if the clocks were right, Gotthold said to himself: Dials are no doubt most ingenious contrivances; but, however ingenious, they are of no use when the sun does not shine. It is the same with us. Destitute of the grace of God, and of the quickening and enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, we too, whatever be our natural gifts and talents, are good for nothing. The wise are not wise, and the most prudent counselors go farthest wrong, when their understanding and judgment are not irradiated by the beams of grace from heaven. The acutest intellects fall into the most fatal errors, unless they humbly acknowledge their inability, and turn to the Sun of Righteousness, and seek to catch its rays. Nay, the most ingenious heads are like the finest watches, which, without constant inspection, are often the first to stop. What, then, must be the consequence of imagining that we know much, when all our knowledge, however great, is not only useless, but even hurtful, both to ourselves and others, unless we also humbly and devoutly imbibe the light of grace from heaven!

My God! By Thy grace I am what I am. Let not Thy grace which has been given unto me, be given in vain. Cause the light of Thy countenance to shine upon me, that I may be able and willing to serve many.

## 42. The Deer

Gotthold one day saw a number of deer which a prince had ordered to be caught and enclosed in wooden cages, as a present, to be sent to a brother monarch across the seas. It seemed very remarkable that, however wild and shy these animals had formerly been, they now fearlessly ate barley, hay,

cabbage, and everything of a similar sort, from the hand. Gotthold observing this, said to himself: my God, how blessed is the yoke of the Cross, and how useful in making us good and meek! When man is exempt from affliction, when he is enjoying pleasure, health, and friends, then he stalks through the world, like the wild stag through the forest, feeling no want, and caring as little for Thee as the stag does for me. The stag, when at large, flies from the sight of a human being, and will take nothing, be it ever so good and precious, from his hand. Ill the season of prosperity, we do the same; when Thy voice calleth. Where art thou, my children? we hide ourselves.<sup>1</sup> When Thou wouldest entice us, we flee away. When Thou offerest Thy grace in the Word, we have no taste for it. Our soul loatheth Thy light bread,<sup>2</sup> and we avoid Thee as an enemy. But as the huntsman waylays the stag in its security, and prostrates it with an unsuspected bullet; so never is our soul in greater danger than when we deem ourselves exposed to none.

Thanks be to Thee my God, that we are not left exposed to peril like this. Thou lettest loose upon us the persecutor and the slanderer. Thou entanglest and takest us captive in the meshes of all sorts of trouble. Thou enclovest us within the bars of poverty, sickness, and affliction, both of mind and body. Then do we begin to think of Thee, become humble and devout, acknowledge Thee as our God and Father, and eagerly accept the consolations presented by Thy gracious hand.

## 43. Election

Cast down with melancholy, a person complained to Gotthold that he was often betrayed against his will into thinking of the decree of election, and that when he considered how great is the number of the reprobate, and how small that of the elect, he could not help doubting whether he belonged to that few, and had a right to believe himself ordained to life eternal.

Gotthold said to him in reply: It happens to you as to foolish children, who, from curiosity, or want of sense, frequently mount upon a ladder or stair, far higher than their heads can bear, and when they are up, know not

how to descend again. I remember an instance of a child venturing out from a high window upon some boards, placed as a stand for flowers, and, in extreme danger, proceeding to his father's apartment, and looking in upon him at his studies.

You are guilty of the same folly; you venture into a dangerous place, climb too high, and wish to have a look into the council-chamber of the Most High. But, my friend, who bade you do this? Reckon it for certain that these thoughts are but phantoms conjured up by the devil, and intended to plunge you into misery, spiritual danger, and continual despondency. What the Scripture says of the election of grace, it says not for the purpose of troubling and terrifying poor souls assailed by temptation, burdened with a sense of sin, and anxious to be delivered from it, but rather for the purpose of soothing their distress. The very reason why God's only Son came down to us here on earth was, to save us from the necessity of soaring on the wings of dangerous thought to heaven, in order to learn there how God is disposed towards us, and what he has decreed respecting our salvation.

## **44. The Trees in Winter**

True believers, said Gotthold, have seasons of unfruitfulness, in which they bring forth no good works, or devout thoughts and aspirations. They are like the trees in winter, which, although destitute of leaves, are not destitute of sap and life, and therefore, when spring returns, bud and blossom, and bear afresh. The ungodly, however, resemble withered trees, which at all seasons alike are without sap and life and fruit, and consequently are lit for nothing but the fire.

## **45. The Mole**

Gotthold one day looked on while a gardener watched a mole, caught it at its mischievous work, threw it with his spade out of the earth, and made it pay with its life for the damage it had done.

This creature's whole employment, thought he then with himself, is to plow up the well-dressed gardens and fields, gnaw and destroy the roots of plants, and by the many heaps it forms, to disfigure and injure the parterres and meadows; all which it does for the sake of its food. Able to see and cater for itself in the dark, and even beneath the earth, it is blind when unexpectedly brought into the light.

And so it is with the man of the world. He burrows and filches in secret; seeks his own advantage at the expense of others, who wither and perish through his devices, and raises on every hand the monuments of his enmity and selfishness. Besides, wise and crafty though he be in temporal things, he knows absolutely nothing of those that are spiritual and divine. But death stands by, and only waits the nod of the Most High, to terminate, in a moment, his projects and intrigues, casts the miserable man out of earth, into earth; I mean, from all his temporal possessions, into the grave. To that dark abode he shall carry nothing away, nor shall his glory descend after him; but having loved darkness rather than the light in this present life, he shall never see the light of the life to come.<sup>3</sup>

Thou faithful God, what would it profit me to live in this world, were I to shut my eyes to the light of heaven! It were better to be a mole, and after death have neither good nor evil to expect, than an ungodly man appointed to the place of everlasting darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

## 46. The Listener

A person complained that, while he was conversing confidentially with a friend, a third party, of whom they had no suspicion, had been lurking and



listening in a corner, and by reporting the conversation, had created great dissension.

Gotthold remarked: Eaves-droppers and listeners, it is true, are dangerous characters, and the great mischief they do may be seen in the instance of Doeg, the blood-thirsty flatterer of King Saul, whose treachery caused the death of fourscore and five priests, with their wives and children. But tell me how came you to be so imprudent in your talk. Do you not know that it would often be better to lose a pearl from a necklace than a word from the tongue? So long as you keep an important word to yourself, it is your own. Utter it, and from that moment it belongs to all by whom it has been heard; and you need not wonder that they treat it as their property, adding to or taking from it, extending or extenuating it, according to their pleasure. The only way to prevent this is to be silent, and to keep in your words.

One thing more. You say that you were conversing confidentially with a friend, and did not observe the listener. But remember the advice of the wise monarch: Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought; and curse not (speak not evil of) the rich in thy bed-chamber, for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.<sup>4</sup> In future, therefore, be not so rash with thy mouth. Forget not that there is a listener always on the watch, who hears, sees, and knows all that we say, do, or think, whether in secret by ourselves, or confidentially with others. I speak of conscience, which never sleeps, and holds a divine commission to report upon our whole conduct. Tell me, would you freely and unreservedly utter all that enters your mind, were you aware that one of the company was treasuring, and would afterwards commit it to writing? Scarcely. Why, then, are you not afraid of your conscience, which records everything you do, and will one day upbraid you with more, perhaps, than you will like to hear?

My God, put a lock upon my mouth, and affix a seal to my lips, that I may never transgress by foolish talking.

## 47. The Eye that Does Not See Itself

The eye, proceeded Gotthold, the noblest member of the human body, does not see itself; and piety and godliness resemble it, in being destitute of self-consciousness. Believers do not believe that they believe. The humble are ignorant of their own humility. The best and most devout suppliants have their minds so full of God, that they are not aware, and never think of the fervor of their prayers. The kindest benefactors have no recollection of the good they do, and are surprised when men thank them for it. The pious fancy that they have no piety, and consequently are always fighting, striving, and exercising themselves to attain it, in which, indeed, growth in godliness consists.

My God! never have I greater reason for suspicion than when I am particularly pleased with myself, my faith, my prayers, and my alms.

## 48. The Young Lamb

One evening Gotthold met a shepherd walking behind his flock, and carrying in his arms a lamb, that had just been dropped in the field. The sight at once reminded him of the good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and he thought of Isaiah's prediction concerning him:<sup>5</sup> He shall feed His flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

He then exclaimed: Far be it from me to imagine for a moment that this shepherd is more attentive and affectionate to his flock, than the Lord Jesus to the church, which He has purchased with His own blood. No, Thou faithful Shepherd! Didst Thou not carry the weak and tender lambs, and watch

continually over them; didst Thou not seek that which is lost, bring again that which is driven away, and bind up that which is broken, Thou wouldst soon have no flock at all.

My Savior! we are sheep and lambs, shy and timid, silly, weak, and helpless creatures, but Thou art a faithful Shepherd, and seest, knowest, and art able to do all things for us. Indeed, wert Thou to withhold Thy care, who could save us from destruction? Lift up, then, my weary soul, Shepherd, and carry it in Thy arms. Let Thine eye be over me, that I fall not behind in the way, and for this I will thank and praise Thee through eternity.

## 49. The Best Chamber

During an examination of a newly-built house, Gotthold inquired of some friends who accompanied him, which of all the apartments they considered the best. One answered that he preferred the parlor, as being lofty in the ceiling, well lighted, and capable of being easily warmed. The others severally fixed upon the kitchen, the cellar, the business office, and the bedrooms.

Gotthold replied: No doubt these chambers will be the favorites of many. But what I meant to ask was, which of them a pious and godly Christian will prefer; and there can be no doubt that that is the chamber set apart as the place of prayer, and of which our Savior says: When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.<sup>6</sup> That chamber is the sanctuary of the house. From it, as from a fountain, the stream of blessing flows, and is conducted into every corner. Over it the heavens are open. There stands the celestial ladder, upon which the angels of God ascend and descend. There man speaks with the Most High, as with a friend, pours out his heart before Him, confides to Him all his concerns, and obtains from Him comfort in tribulation, and joy in the midst of sorrow. There stands the ark, for whose sake the whole family, like that of Obededom, is blessed.<sup>7</sup> Happy he whose house has such a closet, well furnished,

and well employed! The meanest hut, whose inmates abound in prayer, is preferable to the costliest palaces of those who despise God.

My God, my place of prayer shall be wherever I can lift up a devout heart in faith to Thee. I, too, have a chamber appropriated to this holy duty. But I know that Thy goodness is confined to no particular spot, and, therefore, I can build myself an oratory anywhere.

## 50. The Soaring Lark

The lark is distinguished from all other birds by the habit that, when about to sing, it does not seat itself upon the branch of a tree, or in a thorny bush, but soars, in successive pitches, ever higher and higher into the air, as if the longer it sang, the more desirous it grew to reach the heavens, and meant in this way to show in whose honor it pours forth its notes.

Gotthold, one day, as he looked and listened with delight to the little warbler, thought with himself: Well did my Savior say: Behold the fowls of the air.<sup>8</sup> How beautifully this lark indicates to me the true method of prayer and praise to God! Observation shows that it has its almost stated morning and evening hours for mounting from the earth, and chanting its little hymn to the praise of the Creator; and ought I, who receive from that Creator blessings a thousand-fold greater than any bird, to be less diligent in this holy duty? God forbid!

I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth;<sup>9</sup> and although I do occasionally feel that the glow of devotion languishes in my bosom, yet I see in this lark, and know from experience, that there is no better means of fanning it into a flame, than the desire and effort to pray. The higher our spirit soars above the earth, the nearer it approaches heaven, and it cannot be but that that which approaches heaven shall be filled with heavenly wisdom, and that that shall imbibe light which aspires to the light eternal. Lord, when I cry unto Thee, then know I that God is for me.<sup>10</sup>

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1. Gen. 3:9.↵
  2. Numb. 21:5.↵
  3. Psalm 49:18, 19.↵
  4. 1 Samuel 21:7, 22:9. 2 Eccles. 10:20.↵
  5. Isaiah 40:11.↵
  6. Matt. 6:6.↵
  7. 2 Samuel 6:11.↵
  8. Matt. 6:26.↵
  9. Psalm 34:2.↵
  10. Psalm 56:10. Luth. vers.↵

## 51. The Hen

It is well known to be the habit of the hen, that when it has laid an egg, it announces the fact to its owner by loud cackling. On hearing this noise one day, Gotthold thought with himself: This hen acts as proud saints and hypocrites do. Such characters make a trade of godliness, and have no sooner, with only half their heart, performed a good work, than they are eager to have it everywhere trumpeted, and made known to their honor. True Christians are of quite another mind.

## 52. The Earthen Clod

During an excursion into the country, Gotthold, observing the clods upon the rich plowed fields, said to his companions: I recollect having read of an old nobleman, who, every morning when he rose, had a fresh lump of earth brought to him, and for a while inhaled the scent of it, considering this an efficacious means of preserving his health and lengthening his days. I wish that not only all noblemen, but all emperors, kings, princes, and lords, and, indeed, all Christians, observed the same custom. Whatever it might do to their bodies, it would infallibly promote the health of their souls, by reminding them of their mortality and nothingness.

Let man parade, and boast himself as he will, he is nothing but a clod of earth, which the hand of God will very soon bruise and crumble into dust and ashes. There have been many famous monarchs in the world, great in name, power, and achievements. But what are they now? Search the tombs of the mightiest emperors, – of Alexander, Charlemagne, and Otho, – and think you that you will find in them anything but a handful of earth? It is

the same with ourselves. All the great pains we have taken – our cares, toils, honors, and erudition – terminate at last in an earthen clod. For this reason, the wise man, when he beholds us vaboring with all the pomp of the frog in the moonbeam, cannot refrain from mocking us, and asks: Why is earth and ashes proud? Man is filthy while he liveth, and when he is dead, creeping beasts and worms devour him. Oh that we always remembered this!

## 53. Subsided Mud

In a vessel filled with muddy water, the thickness visibly subsided to the bottom, and left the water purer and purer, until at last it seemed perfectly limpid. The slightest motion, however, brought the sediment again to the top, and the water became thick and turbid as before. Here, said Gotthold, when he saw it, we have an emblem of the human heart. The heart is full of the mud of sinful lusts and carnal desires, and the consequence is, that no pure water – that is, good and holy thoughts – can flow from it. It is, in truth, a miry pit and slough of sin, in which all sorts of ugly reptiles are bred and crawl.

Many a one, however, is deceived by it, and never imagines his heart half so wicked as it really is, because sometimes its lusts are at rest, and sink, as it were, to the bottom. On such occasions, his thoughts are apparently devout and holy, his desires pure and temperate, his words charitable and edifying, and his works useful and Christian. But this lasts only so long as he is not moved; I mean so long as he is without opportunity or incitement to sin. Let that occur, and worldly lusts rise so thick, that his whole thoughts, words, and works, show no trace of anything but slime and impurity. One is meek as long as he is not thwarted; cross him, and he is like powder, ignited by the smallest spark, and blazing up with a loud report and destructive effect. Another is temperate so long as he has no jovial companions; a third chaste while the eyes of men are upon him.

Alas, my God! How often have I fancied that the world and all its lusts were a thousand miles away, and yet afterwards discovered that, like a

crafty foe, she had kept quiet only to attack and beguile me unawares. Often, in my communings with Thee, I have vowed that I would be courteous and friendly to the man by whom I had been injured, and would show it by my deportment. Nay, if required at the time, I would have confirmed my vow with any number of oaths; and yet I have afterwards found that the very sight of him so violently stirred and agitated my heart, that nothing was visible in it but the mire of enmity.

Oh, my God! Purge me and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart.<sup>1</sup>

## 54. The Child's Gift

A young girl, with whose mother Gotthold was conversing in a garden, approached him at first with a few leaves, and at last with a flower which she had plucked beside the walk, and, with child-like grace, offered it to him as a present. Well, said he, my little maid, why should I not be satisfied with thy small gifts, bestowed as they are with a simple and child-like desire of giving, even as God must needs be, with similar gifts of mine. Fondly would I often bring to Him great faith, glowing charity, deep devotion, spiritual praise, sincere prayer, and perfect child-like obedience. But, though I search the whole garden of my heart, I can find no such flowers as these, or any worthy of being presented to Him, and He must be content to receive instead, weaknesses, good wishes and intentions, endeavors, and commencements. And so He is. He has shown us His fatherly and affectionate heart, by preferring the two mites cast by the poor widow into the treasury, above all the costly gifts of the rich<sup>2</sup> and by declaring that even a cup of cold water, given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, shall in nowise lose its reward.<sup>3</sup>

Oh, my Father! my soul rejoices and exults that Thou art its God – that it can hope to attain all things from Thee – and that Thou art gracious enough to accept the poor gifts which, with a child's feeble hand, it ventures to present. I will, however, labor at all times to improve my gift. The best



products of my powers and faculties I will bring and make oblation of them, by the hand of Jesus, my Mediator: that will secure for them, however poor, acceptance from Thee.

## 55. The Stork

Some pious friends, who were walking in the country, observed a stork seeking its food upon a beautiful meadow. One of them immediately observed: Let us here call to mind the complaint which the God of mercy makes by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah.<sup>4</sup> The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming, but My people know not the judgment of the Lord.

Alas! how many there are who neglect the day of grace; and although the long-suffering God opens wide to them the gate of heaven, and stretches forth His hand, and says. Here I am<sup>5</sup>, pay no attention, but rather seek an open door to hell – I mean the opportunity of following after their sins.

Oh God! keep us from security and hardness of heart; and make our life a continual act of repentance, and return to Thee!

Gotthold subjoined: I lately read a very remarkable circumstance respecting these birds, namely, that so strong is their affection for their young, that they are not afraid even to die for them. There have been instances of conflagrations, in which they flew to and fro, with water in their beaks, to save their nests upon the burning houses. Nay, it once happened at Delft, in Holland, that, finding it impossible to preserve their brood, they placed themselves upon the nest, spread over them their wings, and so perished with them in the flames. That is what is called dying for love! And of whom should such a circumstance remind us, if not of Him who would fondly gather all the poor children of men under His wings, who upon the cross died, not indeed with us, but for us, and died of love. Yes, verily, no death

could have killed Him. But love to us brought Him from heaven, and stretched and slew Him upon the cross.

The favorite season for gathering and drying plants is when they are in fullest vigor and fairest blossom; and it seems to me as if the heavenly Father had destined for the death of His well-beloved Son the time at which the love of the Son had attained its utmost fervor. And as Jesus then died in love, so in love did He also rise again from the dead, and ascend into heaven, and now and through all eternity, can do nothing but dearly love the children of men. Oh that we had no eyes and no heart but for such a love as this! Oh that it kindled in our bosoms an ever-fresh and ever-fervent love in return!

## **56. The Transplanted Lime [Tree]**

By the passage of a hostile army through the country, an afflicted man complained that he had lost his all, – his house having been plundered and burnt to ashes, and he himself driven from it with nothing but the staff in his hand. Gotthold, heartily sympathizing with him, spoke, for his comfort, as follows: Be of good cheer; we have a God who can make us happy even in adversity. He then pointed to a young lime, which had shortly before been removed from the open field, and planted for ornament and shade in front of his house, and said: Mark that tree. By my command it was lately planted there. Its boughs have all been lopped, the stock polled, and now it stands disfigured and without a leaf. But no other treatment would have done it good. Had the branches been spared, the roots, so recently disturbed, and, as yet, imperfectly established in the foreign soil, could not have supplied them with sap, and, as an inevitable consequence, both they and the stock must have died. There, however, the stock now stands, naked indeed, but still alive, and distributing whatever sap it receives from below into a few little buds, which by degrees will burst, and grow, and flourish.

In the same way does a faithful God often deal with those Christians whom He intends to transplant from the soil of the world into the kingdom of His Son. He suffers them to be reduced to poverty and want, causes the boughs of their temporal prosperity to be hewn off by robbery, injustice, war, or conflagrations, in order that they may serve Him with a readier will; and with lighter burdens and fewer impediments, proceed along the narrow way that leadeth unto life. If you have lost your all, count yourself happy that in this respect you have attained to conformity with your Savior, who had not so much as where to lay His head.<sup>6</sup> At His birth, His bed was a manger, but it was not His own. He taught the people from a ship, but that was Simon Peter's. Into the city of Jerusalem He rode upon an ass, but it was borrowed for the purpose. The little clothing which He possessed, the soldiers divided among them, and cast lots for His seamless coat. The only thing He could call His own, was the cross on which He shed His precious blood. Be thankful, therefore, that although you have lost all else, you have still a cross which you can take up and bear in the footsteps of your Master Jesus.

## 57. The Plant in the Cellar

Having occasion to go into the cellar, Gotthold found a turnip, which had been left by accident, and had vegetated and sent forth long and slender shoots. These, however, were unnaturally of a pale yellow color, and therefore unfit for use. Here, thought he, I have the type of a human undertaking from which God withholds His blessing, and which must, therefore, necessarily miscarry. This plant wants Sunshine and open air. without which it cannot thrive, and so it grows in weakness for a little, and then withers and dies. It is the same with all our acts and enterprises, which are not irradiated by the grace of God, nor fostered by His blessing. According to the words of the Savior, Every plant which my Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.<sup>7</sup>

## 58. The Rose

Perceiving, in the month of May, the pomp and beauty of the roses, a person remarked: This is the flower which the Holy Spirit Himself has selected as the emblem of the believing soul, because, as the rose is environed with thorns, so likewise is such a soul with tribulation.

Gotthold replied: You say well, and no doubt you have also sometimes experienced the thorns which wound and vex the Christian's heart. We are told that the fragrance of the rose is greatly increased by planting a bunch of fetid garlic beside it. If this be true, it serves to illustrate the benefit which may accrue to an upright and godly man from a wicked and shameless slanderer. In fact, the fame of many would be circumscribed by narrow limits, if their slanderers did not help, even against their will, to sound it far and wide. The reason is, that the more a man is calumniated and traduced, the more do the honorable-minded, who prefer their own good name above all the treasures of the world, and are, consequently, reluctant to believe discreditable things of others, feel bound to take into account the person, look, gestures, and dispositions of him who utters the calumny, and so are led to feel a deeper interest than they otherwise would in the party against whom it is leveled. The ultimate consequence is, that the rose remains, after all, a fragrant and beautiful flower, and the garlic an offensive weed; I mean that the virtuous man continues to be honored and beloved, while the slanderer is disgraced and hated. Besides, the slanderer exercises the good man's patience, shows him the maliciousness of the devil, weans him from the world, exercises him in humility, acquaints him with his sins, and incites him to fly from the vices with which he is charged, and to cultivate the opposite virtues. In short, every calumny thrown at him is a pearl that will one day beautify his celestial crown. This is what King David affirms when he says: Lord, in humbling me (by shame and persecution). Thou hast made me great.<sup>8</sup>

My God, Thou makest all things work together for good to them that love Thee.<sup>9</sup> That I do love Thee, is no doubt more than I can say of myself. But that I earnestly wish to love Thee, I can with truth declare. Yea, could I

collect in my heart the love of all angels and all men, I would pour forth the whole flood to Thee, and Thee alone. Oh, then, let the reproaches of mine enemies become to me a praise, and their curse a blessing!

## 59. The Caged Bird

Gotthold had kept a singing bird for some time in a cage, so that at last it became habituated to its prison, and not only warbled its cheerful and pleasant notes, but even, when the door was opened, showed no desire to escape. Observing this, he could not help saying to himself: Ah me! would that I could learn from this bird contentment with my condition, and submission to the Divine will! Would that I were habituated to the ways and dealings of my God, and believed in my heart that His designs towards me cannot but be good! This little bird is, indeed, imprisoned, but it receives abundance of food, and therefore is content, – hops about upon the perch, sings its song, and has no desire to change its condition. Even so God often environs me with divers crosses and straits, but never yet has left me destitute of comfort or succor. Why, then, am I not happy? Why do I not sing, and thank Him with a joyful heart, even in the midst of tribulation?

One feels constrained to do, as Luther expresses it, lift the hat, and say to such a bird, “Dear doctor, I must confess that I greatly lack your skill. You sleep by night in your little nest, undisturbed by care. In the morning you rise, cheerful and merry, take your seat upon your perch, warble your song of praise and gratitude to God, and then seek and find your food.”

Well then, my God, I too will be content and happy, and wish for nothing but what Thou wilt. From my cross, my burden, my adversity, I will not ask to be relieved until it please Thee to relieve me. Nay, I have no desire even to be in heaven, so long as it is Thy pleasure that I should serve Thee and Thy church in this life of misery and toil. To me let Thy will be heaven; Thy counsel, wisdom; Thy good pleasure, satisfaction! The only wish I have is, that it may be well with me in time and eternity. But, as this my wish is also Thy will, our end and aim are one and the same, and it is only

about the ways and means of attaining it that we sometimes disagree. No harm, however, is done, although the way Thou leadest me is different from that which my folly reckons good; provided Thou leadest me well, and I secure the object of my desire.

## 60. The Trees in Blossom

Late in spring, when the weather was beautiful, and the fruit trees showed one mass of blossom, Gotthold, walking in his garden, and feasting his eyes with their splendor, made the following observations to a friend:

These trees bear much more blossom than they can possibly ripen into fruit. This shows in them an inward and natural disposition to pay liberally for the ground they occupy, but afterwards they are more or less hindered by outward circumstances, from carrying it into effect. It is the same with good men. Ah, me! how large, how keen, how many thousand-fold are often their good resolutions and inward desires to love and serve the Lord! God, we hear them cry, had I the love of all angels and men, it should burn for Thee alone! Had I ten thousand hearts, to Thee should they be consecrated and resigned! Had I the tongues of all mankind, their only employment should be to praise and extol Thee, God of glory! With what alacrity and joy I will henceforth serve Thee I Ah, me! why did I not know Thee sooner, Thou pure and eternal love! Depart from me, ye evil doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.<sup>10</sup> At such a time, the tree is in full blossom; and the inward impulse of the Holy Spirit, and the constraining power of the love of Christ, are powerfully felt. Scarce a tithe of the blossom, however, ripens into fruit. But as man, notwithstanding, takes pleasure in beholding it upon the tree, so does God delight in a heart overflowing with fervor, and holy resolutions, and in the fruits and works of righteousness, though these may at first be few.

Lord, my God and Father! have patience likewise with me, and be satisfied with the blossom and poor firstlings of my Christianity. Do Thou also

purge me, and vouchsafe to me Thy blessing, that I may become more and more fruitful and productive.

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1. Psalm 51:10.↵
2. Luke 21:2, 3.↵
3. Matt. 10:42.↵
4. Jer. 8:7.↵
5. Isaiah 58:9.↵
6. Matt. 8:20.↵
7. Matt. 15:13.↵
8. Psalm 18:35. Luth. vers.↵
9. Rom. 8:28.↵
10. Psalm 119:115.↵

## **61. The Trees in Blossom, and the Bees**

Further discoursing upon this subject, they observed that the bees were haunting the trees in crowds, humming among the branches, and gathering honey in the flowers. See, said Gotthold, here is an image of temporal prosperity. So long as there is blossom on the trees, and honey in the blossom, the bees will frequent them in crowds, and fill the place with their music; but, when the blossom is over, and the honey gone, they too will disappear.

The same happens in the world among men. In the abodes of fortune and pleasure, friends will be found in plenty; but when fortune flies away, they depart along with it. Temporal gain is the world's honey, and the allurements with which you may entice it whithersoever you will; but where the gain terminates, there, likewise, do the love and friendship of the world stop. For this reason, let all good men be advised to fly to Christ crucified, who never forsakes, in their distress, those who truly seek him.

## **62. The Caterpillars**

Gotthold had feasted his eyes upon the rich blossom of the trees, and indulged the hope that, in autumn, he would joyfully gather the fruit. In a few days, however, he discovered that a noxious mildew had bred a multitude of caterpillars, and that these had consumed both blossoms and leaves, and left the branches as naked as if they had been scorched with fire. Such, thought he, is the fate of human hopes and pleasures, which vanish like vapor before we are aware. Wherever there are leaves, blossom, and fruit, be sure there



will also be caterpillars to waste and consume them. When we fancy our prosperity to be in full blossom, and prepare to enjoy it to our heart's content, in a moment we discover that it has vanished like a shadow. All that is good here beneath the sun is attended by some evil, or encounters some foe. Pleasure, riches, honor, and joy are sure to have care, disgrace, adversity, and affliction in their train. There is no pleasure without pain, no joy without sorrow. Oh the folly of expecting lasting felicity in a vale of tears, or paradise in a ruined world!

## **63. The Caterpillar's Nest**

Proceeding through his orchard, Gotthold continued: Let us not, however, forget that we have all a caterpillar's nest in our own bosoms; I mean a carnal and depraved heart, in which wicked lusts, the spawn of original sin, are bred and swarm. These, if indulged, immediately creep forth, and destroy both soul and body. It gives the Christian enough to do to keep them down, and at last put them to death. To this effect, Luther himself said, that he was more afraid of his own heart than of the Pope and all his cardinals; and to myself a good man once observed: My own heart makes life bitter to me, and death sweet.

Over this caterpillar's nest, help me. Lord, to watch diligently, and with all my might to check its brood of vices. Oh, when wilt Thou save me from myself, and from my own heart!

## **64. The Walnut Tree**

Some worthy persons had seated themselves beneath a walnut tree, in order to enjoy the protection of its shade from the heat of the day. Gotthold

happening to pass, accosted, and warned them not to tarry long where they were, as the shade of the walnut tree is injurious to the health, and usually causes severe headache. On their replying that they were not, as yet, sensible of the slightest bad effects, he rejoined: But you certainly will experience them afterwards, though not, perhaps, for a day. In this tree, he proceeded to say, we have an emblem of bad company. A good man, when obliged to associate and converse with persons of an opposite character, often resolves that he will be upon his guard, keep the door of his senses barred, and allow nothing sinful to enter his mind; and in this, at first, he thinks that he succeeds. Afterwards, however, he is almost always obliged to confess, with sorrow, that bad company has been to him like this tree, whose shadow for awhile cools and refreshes us, but in the sequel is the cause of much trouble. Satan knows what advantage afterwards to take of all that has occurred, and once more calls up the carnal ideas before the inward eye, to disturb the mind in its holy exercises, and sensibly impair the fervor of its devotion. Though he may have listened without pleasure, and even with positive dis-relish and abhorrence to the jests, extravagances, and follies of the licentious company, the good man will yet have enough to do to resist the assaults and repel the darts of Satan. Truly, therefore, did an old teacher call bad companions the wet nurses of the devil. It is best to keep aloof from them. The little sinful pleasure they can give, will issue at last in pain and sorrow.

The saintly Tauler says, in one of his discourses: "Turn we, whithersoever or to whomsoever we may, in this sphere of time, we shall find nothing but falsehood, treachery, and dissension, in all outward objects and persons. Often where we seek, and think we shall surely find solace and delight, there we lose all inward comfort, and are wholly robbed of that peace of mind which has cost us many a day in our retirement to lay up. Nay,, we even cause great trouble in our breast,

for we burden ourselves with the guilt of idle, superfluous, and false words, with waste of time, and various other sins, which freeze the heart and extinguish love, so that conscience afterwards sorely gnaws and stings us." These, my God, were the words of Thy servant, more than three hundred years ago. What would he have said now, when ungodliness has swelled to to overwhelming a flood, that a man of tender conscience can no

longer pass his threshold, or look out of his window, without witnessing some scandal?

Lord, keep watch over my soul, and bring it through danger and Satan's many snares, despite his malice, unto everlasting life. Oh, how shall I then extol Thy name for ever and ever!

## 65. The Cloud of Tribulation

My God and Father, subjoined Gotthold in prayer, I call to mind the words of Thy prophet<sup>1</sup>, Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through. Alas! so it is too often with me and Thee. A dark cloud of trouble encamps between us. Nor can I complain of this, for it arises from my own sins and transgressions. Still, as the sun shines even behind the clouds, operates in them, and sheds its genial influence, with the rain, upon the earth; so, even in trouble. Thou still continuest my God, and so powerful is Thy working in it, that, after a brief interval, I can mark the traces of Thy grace upon my soul; and hence, whether smiling or frowning. Thou art still my beloved Father and my gracious God!

## 66. The Father

Reflecting, said Gotthold, upon the words of Thy prophet. How great is Thy goodness Lord, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee<sup>2</sup>, it seems to me that he means to depict God as a Father who, no doubt, keeps His children under discipline, and subjects them to the rod, but who, with all his labor and pains, still aims at nothing but to lay for them a store which may contribute to their comfort, when they have grown to maturity and learned the prudent use of it.

My Father, in this world Thou hidest from Thy children Thy great goodness, as if it did not pertain to them. But being Thy children, we may be well assured that the celestial treasures will be bestowed upon none else. For this reason, I will bear my lot with patience. But oh! from time to time, waft to me a breath of air from the heavenly land, to refresh my sorrowful heart; I will then wait more calmly for its full fruition. How amiable are Thy tabernacles, Lord of Hosts! my soul, longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God<sup>3</sup>. When shall I come and appear before God?<sup>4</sup>

## 67. The Flower Pot

As he was walking in a garden, Gotthold saw a collection of flowers, planted in beautifully painted and ornamented pots, and shown off upon a lofty stage; and he thought with himself: Even these flowers are daughters of the earth; by earth they live, and to earth they shall be turned. Of earth, too, are formed, and with earth are filled, the gaudy pots in which they grow. Wait but a little, and of all the showy flowers which figure on that lofty stage, there will be no more to say than of the humble violet that creeps upon the ground, and fades in the month of March. Paint such a flower-pot, and inscribe it with the motto: We fade like other flowers; earth and nothing more; and you will have an appropriate emblem of worldly greatness and glory. It is true, that in the garden of the world God has exalted some men among the rest, and given them superior consequence and distinction, by the dignities, honors, offices, wealth, palaces, clothing, or attendants, which they possess. After all, however, they still continue earth and ashes, are sustained by the earth, like others; and when they have shed their blossoms, and finished their course, become earth in the strictest sense of the word.

## 68. Frailties

A good man was complaining of his many frailties. I am, he said, like a child, who this moment gives, and the next takes back the gift. In my intentions, I give liberally to my God, but I soon reclaim all that I have given. When He alarms or corrects me, I make Him plenty of promises; but, alas! they are soon forgotten, and seldom kept. Hereupon his eyes filled with tears.

Well, said Gotthold, if it be true that you are like a child, it is also true that God likens Himself to a father, who pitieth his children<sup>5</sup>. For my part, I never either saw or heard of a father who, for a few faults or short-comings, drove his child from his home, drowned him in the river, or cast him into the fire. Without patience, and a large measure of pity on a father's part, it is impossible to train a child and rear him to manhood; and unless God overlook many faults, and exercise great compassion towards us, not one of us will ever enter heaven. Or, do we men, who are evil, suppose that we can possibly be more patient than the gracious and long-suffering God? The moon, even at the brightest, is not without spots; and just as little is the Christian without sins, even at his best. It is true he has forsaken his sins, but his sins have not forsaken him. Recollect that you are under the eye and discipline of a good and gracious God, who knoweth our frame, and whose wisdom and goodness shine most conspicuously in the fatherly long-suffering and forbearance with which He treats the frailties of His saints, and renders even these subservient to their welfare. Above all, however, forget not to look to the crucified Jesus, and His sacred blood and merits. You are not the man to stand before God in your own strength; Christ must be in you, and you in Christ.

## 69. The Weeping Damsel

Seeing a young lady in tears, Gotthold, inquiring into the cause, was told, that in a company of persons of her own age, she had been slighted and overlooked on account of her poverty, plain attire, and simple manners. He thereupon exclaimed: Blessed is he whom the world slights and disregards! He is like the shipwrecked mariner, tossed by the violence of the sea, but tossed upon a cliff, where he can save his life. How good it is when the world, which usually plays the part of seductress for the devil, itself cuts off the opportunity of sinning! Believe me, those young ladies who are so gaily attired, and so fondly worshiped and caressed, are like beautiful flowers, around which the bees and moths swarm in crowds, to rob them of their honey. Godliness is like a precious oil in a brittle vial. The best way to preserve it is to lay it upon the shelf, and not trust it into imprudent hands. If you are no favorite with the world, let the world be no favorite with you, and this will adjust the balance. Make it your single aim to please God. Let the crown and wreath about your head be His grace; your necklace, a string of texts of Scripture; your pearls, tears of repentance, prayer, and love; your garments, piety and righteousness of faith; your ring, a good conscience; your lace, humility; your white linen, an unblemished walk; your favorite language, prayer; your mirror, the law, and holy life of Jesus; and your riches, heaven. Thus you will be the bride of Christ, and, in the land of glory, be preferred before many others.

## 70. The Invalid

Gotthold one day visited a sick man, who suffered great inward anguish, as the drops of sweat upon his face testified. He tossed impatiently from side to side upon his bed, often rose, and made them carry him from place to place, in the vain hope of finding ease and rest.

Gotthold sighed to behold him, and thought with himself: How vain to think of curing inward care and trouble by external means, apply or change them as often as you may! The best thing for this poor man would be to exercise, if he could, some little self-control, and patiently wait till rest came.

But we often act in the same way in our spiritual troubles. The burdened conscience, or the heart pierced by the arrows of the Almighty seeks rest in restlessness, tries every plan, and endeavors by outward pleasure to deaden the sense of inward anguish.

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1. Lam. 3:44.↩
2. Psalm 31:19.↩
3. Psalm 84:1,2↩
4. Psalm 42:2↩
5. Psalm 103:13.↩

## 71. The Swallow

One day in spring, Gotthold observed a Swallow busily employed in building its nest, and fastening it to one of the windows of the church. It collected and wrought the clay with its bill; and, although it could carry little at a time, still, by dint of unceasing industry, it contrived, ere long, to fashion and complete the fabric.

Here, said he to himself, I have a pleasing image of the industrious and godly man. Many such commence life as poor as this bird, which has nothing but what God allots it, or its bill can scrape together. Nevertheless, if they do not grow weary in prayer and well-doing, the bountiful Giver of all good gives them one penny today, and another tomorrow, until they accumulate a heap of surprising magnitude.

If, however, it be true that persevering labor, conjoined with the Divine blessing, can do so great things, I ought to act upon this truth in collecting spiritual riches. My abilities are small, and my faith weak; still I will trust to God's gracious aid, and never doubt that, by steady exercise and holy diligence, my Christianity will increase and improve from day to day. It is Thy method, God, when Thou hast a great work in hand, to begin with little things, or even with nothing, that Thy excellent power and free grace may have all the glory. Even so I will never fear the successful increase of my godliness, however small it may be, so long as Thy good Spirit does not cease to work within me.

Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy Spirit is good. Lead me into the land of uprightness.<sup>1</sup>

## 72. The Hewn Willows



Gotthold observed that some willow trees, which had been hewn down and laid upon the ground, to mend the path, had sprouted, and sent their shoots upright into the air.

This, said he, is a pleasing image of those who, having been humbled by sickness and divers misfortunes, lie, as it were, prostrate under the world's feet, but direct their sighs and aspirations, desires and thoughts, solely to the better world – of such a person, for instance, as Lazarus. Oh, how blessed is that humiliation which elevates the heart to heaven! How desirable, to lie beneath the feet of the world, in respect of our outward circumstances, while in spirit we repose in the bosom of God!

## 73. The Wounded Stag

Proceeding, Gotthold remarked: As the stag, which the huntsman has hit, flies through bush and brake, over stock and stone, and thereby exhausts its strength, but does not expel the deadly bullet from its body; so does experience show that they who have troubled consciences run from place to place, but wherever they go, bear with them their dangerous wounds. In such cases, the true remedy is patience, and the word of the prophet: I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him.<sup>2</sup> Sighs, groans, and tears, are not forbidden, but impatience, and incessant change of place, only aggravate the evil.

Oh thou faithful God! if it be Thy gracious will to bring anguish like this upon my soul, enable me to wait upon Thee, from whom cometh my salvation.<sup>3</sup> Lord Jesus, in obedience to Thy word, when I labor and am heavy laden, I will go unto Thee, for with Thee I shall assuredly find rest unto my soul.<sup>4</sup> If I run at all, it shall be after Thee, and as a weeping child. As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me. Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice, and deliver my soul in peace from the battle that was against me.<sup>5</sup>

## 74. The Folded Hands

The grace having been one day said at table, the question was started, what might be signified by the custom of folding the hands at prayer, when Gotthold began and said:

The outward posture and carriage of the body and its several members, during prayer, has been different in different periods, and among different nations. In the Old Testament, and likewise at the commencement of the New, it was the custom to pray with the arms and hands extended, so that the body of the suppliant formed a perfect cross. This custom was, no doubt, suggested to the early believers by the remembrance, and was intended also to serve as a memorial, of their Lord's death. In subsequent times it gave place to our method of folding the hands, which has not only the same, but, as I shall endeavor to explain, a much larger import.

We pray with our thumbs across, and this ought to remind us to found our expectations of being heard upon our crucified Savior. The fingers intertwined admonish in like manner, to pray in sincerity, with pacific and forgiving hearts, inasmuch, as if our minds be alienated by strife and discord, our prayers cannot please the God of peace. It often happens, that during prayers, and as the warmth of our devotion increases, the hands involuntarily clasp closer and closer together, as if we grasped some object between them, and wished to hold it fast. Of this, a pious man once said: "Often, when in prayer, I feel as if I held between my palms the fatherly heart of my God and the bloody hand of the Lord Jesus, for I remind the one of His divine love and inconceivable mercies, and I grasp the other by His promise, and strive to hold Him fast and say, I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me."<sup>6</sup> As we likewise know that a devout heart is the chief requisite for acceptable prayer, so may the linking of the fingers remind us that we ought not in prayer to permit our thoughts to flutter to and fro, but should bind them firmly together by holy resolution, and point them to the one object of calling upon God in spirit and in truth.<sup>7</sup>

In like manner, finally, the folding of the hands conduces to humility in prayer; inasmuch as we thereby present ourselves before a righteous God in

something of the attitude of malefactors, with our hands bound. Oh that when we do so, we may clearly and inwardly feel that, by our manifold sins, we have justly deserved to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness, so that in our prayers we can no longer plead our rights, but only implore mercies.

Lord Jesus! give me a truly believing, meek, and humble heart, and then when I pray, I shall never pray in vain.

## 75. The Hop Plant

Having gone into a hop ground, Gotthold took pleasure in observing how elegantly the weak and slender plant twined around the poles, and climbed till it overtopped them, and began to reflect why it had pleased the infinitely wise Creator of all things to make this and other plants, such as the vine, the ivy, the pea, and the cucumber, which cannot grow without extraneous help and support.

One reason, as he observed, no doubt was, that I might everywhere find objects to remind me how weak I am. These plants are destitute alike of beauty and fruitfulness, unless they find a pole to be the support of their feebleness. It is the same with my soul, which labors under a thousand infirmities. Sin makes me weak and so does sorrow, and manifold temptations from within and without; and how could I exist, or shoot towards heaven, unless upheld by the power of God and the stake of the cross of Christ?

These plants are impelled by a natural exigence to seek support; so that we sometimes see them creeping for a space along the ground, and, as it were, languishing till they meet with something around which they can twine. Several of them, too, are provided by nature with little tendrils and bands, by which they fasten and attach themselves to their supports. Even so do I feel within me the motion of the Holy Spirit, constantly reminding me of my weakness, inspiring me with repentance and humility, and making me yearn for the grace of God and the cross of my Lord Jesus. My tendrils

and bands are the believing sighs with which I take hold of Christ, the prop and support of my salvation, and so, weak though I am, I stand even against the might of the gates of hell!

## 76. The Rod

Visiting a friend one day, Gotthold found him seated with his family at table, and observed that the children all received a due portion of food, and were required to eat it in a quiet and orderly way; but, that beside the father's plate, there was also lying upon the table a rod, to warn them against improprieties of conduct and manners.

He thereupon observed to his friend: You treat your children as our heavenly Father treats His. He, too, prepares a table before them<sup>8</sup>, and gives them all sorts of good things, spiritual and temporal, to enjoy, and yet the rod, which is another name for the cross, must likewise be at hand, that we may not become froward, but walk in holy fear and filial obedience. Of this truth, God has given us an almost similar emblem in the Sacred Scriptures. For the ark of the Old Testament contained not only the golden pot with the manna, but also Aaron's rod, which blossomed, to intimate the authority He exercises over His family, and teach us that although He feeds the members with the hidden manna<sup>9</sup> of His sweet grace. He also purposes to use the rod, if He shall see cause, and to do both the one and the other for our welfare and salvation. The same hand prepares the table and wields the rod.

From one and the same heart flow both comfort and cross. God continues our loving and gracious Father when He chastises and corrects, no less than when He refreshes and comforts us. A good man once pertinently said, that it was a doubtful matter whether bread or chastisement was best for children, because, while bread was necessary for them to live, chastisement was necessary for their living well. Even so must we, too, confess that the dear cross is as needful to us as life itself, and far more needful and salutary than all the blessings and honors of the world. In heaven, the glorified spirits, who now fully understand its mystery, and enjoy, in the everlasting rest,

the sweet fruit which grows upon this thorny brier, will thank the all-wise and gracious God especially, for His holy cross and fatherly correction, without which they would never have reached the seat of bliss and glory. Let us also learn this lesson, and say from the heart: It is good for me that I have been afflicted<sup>10</sup>, that I might learn Thy statutes.

Whether we like it or not, the Lord our God will not change His ways. Whoever wishes to be His child, must take bread and sorrow together from His hand. No guest at His table need think it strange to see the rod upon it, and be obliged often to eat his heavenly Father's bread moistened with tears. Here, in this world, it cannot be otherwise; but when we shall one day sit at His table in heaven, every rod shall be cast into the fire.

Oh my Father! I am becoming accustomed, by degrees, to Thy ways, and have no objection to the rules of Thy domestic government. Daily do I strive to learn, not only to relish the bread, but also to kiss the rod.

## 77. Death

Many a man, said Gotthold, has an ill-favored countenance, is lean and haggard, pale and sallow, and mean in his attire, and yet, under an ungainly exterior, conceals great talents and virtues. Such is the case with death. Ah me! how much that is good, and sweet, and blessed, is concealed beneath its spur aspect and transitory bitterness! It is not I who die when I die, but my sin and misery. As often as I think of death, I figure to myself that I see a messenger coming from a distant land, bringing me good news of my Savior, the Bridegroom of my soul, and of the inheritance which He has purchased with His blood, and reserves for me in heaven. What care I although the messenger have an ugly face, be armed with a long dart, wear a tattered coat, and knock rudely at my door? I attend less to his appearance than to his business.

My Faithful Savior! It should not distress me though all the birds of the air were daily and hourly to sing and discourse to me of my mortality. The

nectar I sip from Thy dripping wounds, swallows up the few bitter drops which death pours out to me from his cup, at my departure from this world. What, Lord Jesus, should I long for more than to depart and be with Thee!

## 78. The Marriage

Being present at a marriage, after the performance of the ceremony, Gotthold observed, with wonder, the pains and unremitting attention and zeal of the parents of the bride to entertain the guests and minister to their enjoyment. Well, said Gotthold to himself, Marriage seems to me to be one of the most unaccountable of miracles. These parents love their child; they brought her into the world with sorrow and pain, educated her with much labor and expense, and now have reared her to that time of life at which she might be helpful to them in their impending old age, and take a share in the management of their business or household; when, behold, they give her away to a man who is a stranger to them, and never did anything to earn the boon. Nay, they give her with outlay and trouble, joy and feasting, as if they counted it a happy thing to be quit of her. What is more, with their child they likewise give him their hearts, and conceive for him an affection often as strong as for their own bodily offspring. The daughter, likewise, now forsakes her father's house, and all the enjoyments to which she was there accustomed, and resigns herself to the conjugal service of a man, who, but a short time before, was wholly unknown to her. Verily, there is here a higher hand, which knows how to incline hearts, and knit them together, above all human thought and expectation, but in His own wise and wondrous way.

My God, we men have often our hands so full, that we forget that the supreme government of all things belongs to Thee. And Thou, on Thy part, often conductest Thy government so quietly, or permittest events to take so strange a course, that the last thing we would suspect is the presence of Thy hand in the game. A closer inspection, however, soon shows us that Thou controllest and bringest into order the vast confusion of the world, and,

even in silence, marvelously displayest Thy gracious crown. He, therefore, is a fool who wills anything but what Thou wilt.

## 79. The Clouds

After a heavy fall of rain, and when a gentle east wind was beginning to clear the sky, Gotthold walked forth into the fields, thanked his God for the fertilizing storm; and lifting his eyes to the heavens and beholding the rolling clouds, said to himself: My God, there go the chariots in which (to use the language of weak men) Thou ridest forth to inspect Thy fields and gardens. Thy meadows, forests, and plains. Beggars are wont to run behind the chariots of the wealthy, and cry aloud for alms. To Thee, God, we are all beggars; and when Thou ridest forth on Thy chariot of the clouds, we cry after Thee, Give us this day our daily bread. The clouds are also the pitcher with which, like a gardener. Thou waterest the sultry glebe SOIL in times of drought. They are the pipes by which Thou conductest moisture into the firmament, and thence causeth it to descend in rain, and bless the earth. They are Thy storehouses, richly filled with wine, beer, oil, butter, corn, and malt, and Thou openest it in Thy goodness, and satisfiest the desire of everything that lives. They are great curtains, which, at Thy good pleasure, Thou drawest as a covering for the plants, that they may not be withered and destroyed by the continuance of the heat. Not seldom, too, are they the arsenal in which Thou keepest Thine artillery of thunder and lightning, in order, at set times, to strike the children of men with reverential awe, or inflict upon them some great punishment.

## 80. The Shooting Match

In a certain neighborhood, the young men had been allowed, for pleasure and pastime, to set up a target, at which they shot, all endeavoring to do their best. Gotthold happened to be in the vicinity, and, hearing the reports, fell into the following train of reflection:

All of these shooters aim at the black mark, and yet there can be little doubt that only a few will hit it. The same is the case with our Christianity and its perfection. Since the fall we no longer (to use the sportsman's phrase) have a steady hand. But although an outline of Divine perfection, in other words, the Law, is set before us, as the mark at which, in all our thoughts, words, and works, we are to aim; still we so often shoot aside, that our perfection is really imperfection, and we must even reckon it a kind of perfection to be aware how imperfect we are, mourn over our defects, and endeavor, by the practice of godliness, to grow daily better.

None of us has reached the mark as we ought to have done; but we are all upon the way to it, one nearer, another not so near, and God is satisfied with us, if He only find us laboring and pressing towards it. Would that men were but satisfied with each other, when this one strikes the center, and that one only touches the corner of the target! Why do we despise a brother because we are nearing the goal, while he is doing his best to follow? Show me the man who has always hit and never missed the mark, – I mean who has at all times and in all things chosen the better part, – and I will look upon him with astonishment, as an angel.

My God! keep my Christianity in continual exercise; for exercise brings increase, and increase, at last, perfection, – not, perhaps, such as will satisfy man, but such as will satisfy Thee, my benign and merciful Judge.

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1. Psalm 143:10↩
  2. Micah 7:9.↩
  3. Psalm 62:1.↩
  4. Matt. 11:28, 29.↩
  5. Psalm 55:16–18↩
  6. Gen. 32:26.↩



7. John 4:24.↵
8. Psalm 23:5.↵
9. Heb. 9:4., Rev. 2:17.↵
10. Psalm 119:71.↵

## 81. The Silkworm

On being shown some silk-worms, kept by a boy in a band-box, and fed with mulberry leaves, Gottold thought with himself: And so it is a worm that ministers to men the means of luxury and pomp! I could wish that no ribbon were ever either sold or put on, until such a worm were shown and contemplated. Perhaps this might lead some to reflect how absurd it is for one worm to ornament himself with what another spins, especially considering that at last, with all his glory, he must become the prey of worms. For the rest, the silk-worm obeys the instinct which is common to all the caterpillar tribe. When it has eaten its portion, and lived its time, it looks about for some corner in which it may lie down, unseen and undisturbed, and die. There it immures and envelops itself in its web, and all the store which it has gathered, serves no other purpose than to make for it a burying-place.

Alas, ye children of men! you, too, eat and drink, accumulate fortunes, and strain every nerve to become great in the world; but all this issues at last in the necessity of choosing for yourselves a grave. Happy he who, from this insect, learns in time to forego temporal things, and bends all his thoughts to consider how he may at last die in peace!

Thou faithful God! my chief anxiety is for my soul, and the best thing I can do for it is to wrap and clothe it in the fair white silk of Christ's righteousness.<sup>1</sup> Grant that, like a beautiful butterfly, I may one day burst forth, and wing my way to the life eternal.

## 82. The Rye in Flower

Experience shows that if you pluck a stalk of rye, strip it of the blossom, and hold it for a little in your hand, the blossom will come again. Conversing with a friend, to whom he had shown this, and who expressed his surprise at the fact, and his desire to know the cause, Gotthold said: In many things we observe a strong vegetative power. From the grain of corn in the ground nature elicits a shoot, and pushes it through the stiff crust of the earth, and then from the shoot a stalk, and from the stalk an ear. In trees there is a pressure which moves the sap, and from the solid wood produces leaves, and flowers and fruits. In the stock and branches of the vine, too, the sap is forced upwards, and when the pruning has made the room to hold it insufficient, it flows out, as if the plant were weeping. Now, in these ears there is a power of the same kind, and of a strength sufficient to renew the blossom, even when that has been stripped away. This power others may call by what name, and describe in what way, they please. I say, that it is the incessantly productive goodness of God, which operates always, makes all things shoot and grow, and never ceases promoting the good of man.

But what you observe in plants, you ought also to experience within yourself; according to the words of the apostle: As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.<sup>2</sup> In truth, the power of God's Spirit is never at rest. It quickens and moves continually the hearts of the godly. From it proceed all holy thoughts, devout desires, heavenly yearnings, longing sighs, affectionate tears, fervent prayers, and unwearied diligence in the service of God and mankind; as flower succeeds flower in the rye, so does one act of devotion, love and joy, another. If you have no experience of the kind, learn now from this humble stalk that the fault is your own; either you do not mark, or you do not obey, the motions of God's Spirit.

Lord Jesus! what can I do without Thy strength? For what am I fit without Thy Spirit? Unless it quicken the inward powers of my soul, I am impotent alike either to will or to do. Quicken me, then, God! but help me likewise to obey Thy impulse with alacrity.

## 83. Thistles

Passing a field one day, Gotthold observed that there were many thistles mixed with the wheat, and rivaling it in growth, on which he observed: We often see the match of this in the world. It happens, for instance, with superior minds; for along with the fine wheat of useful counsels and lofty thoughts, they likewise breed and foster many a thistle of folly and dangerous error. The same thing happens also with our own heart, which, when bedewed with the grace and Spirit of God, sometimes promises to abound with the fruits of righteousness. But, alas! how many thistles and weeds does not the enemy scatter among these, and how many grow of themselves, as in all barren land? In fine, the same is also the case with our prosperity and temporal welfare. When our wheat is ripest, and we imagine that nothing remains but to apply the sickle, and gather it in, in full sheaves, we find that the Most High has caused thistles to grow amongst it; I mean, He has checkered our prosperous state with much adversity, in order that we may recognize the nothingness of the world, and long all the sooner, and all the more ardently, for heaven.

My God! in the world there is no wisdom without folly, no happiness without misery, no piety without sin, no good without evil, and no use without abuse. Oh, guide me to the place where Thou Thyself dwellest, and where Thou art surrounded with the adorations of Thine elect! There is no evil with Thee. In Thee I shall possess all things, for Thou wilt be all in all.<sup>3</sup>

## **84 – Transplanted Trees and Flowers**

As Gotthold was examining, with delight, some double pinks, which at the time were in full blossom, he was told by the gardener that the same plants had in former years borne only single flowers, but that they had been improved and beautified by repeated transplantations, and that in the same manner a change of soil increases the growth, and accelerates the bearing of a young tree.

This reminded Gotthold that the same happens to men. Many a man, who at home would scarcely have borne even single flowers, when transplanted by Divine Providence abroad, bears double ones; another, who, if rooted in his native soil, would never have been more than a puny twig, is removed to a foreign clime, and there spreads far and wide his luxuriant boughs, and bears fruit to the delight of all. In his native place, a man is seldom judged of by his real qualities, but much oftener by the opinion of his friends or adversaries. If of high and noble lineage, the luster of his family may easily brighten his darkness, and not seldom empty bladders swim upon the surface. If, on the contrary, he be of humble parentage, and the first or second, perhaps, who has shed the light of honors or arts upon the family, all the rest, from dislike or fear, do their utmost to obscure it, imagining that the more one rises, the more must the others fall. At home, accordingly, a man is esteemed only as much as love or hatred, friendship or enmity, favor or dislike, permit him to be. Abroad it is the man himself who is considered, and not the coat he wears. Often, too, strangers are like the gardeners, or flower fanciers, who prefer beautiful exotics for the ornaments of their beds.

My God, I thank Thee for having, so far above all my expectations, transplanted me from the place of my nativity to a foreign soil, where, until this hour, Thou hast shaded me by Thy grace, and shed on me the dew of Thy blessing! Enable me to bear much fruit unto Thee and my neighbor, and, with Jacob, daily to say:

“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto thy servant.”<sup>4</sup>

## **85. The Bird in the Hands of Children**

A party of children were amusing themselves with a bird, to whose leg they had fastened a string. The poor thing fluttered into the air, and wished

to escape, but felt itself suddenly checked and drawn downwards. Gotthold, who saw what was passing, thought with himself: It is even so with our soul when it gets entangled with temporal things and worldly lusts. Good friends, merry company, diversions, and meetings of all kinds, are often nothing but cords which restrain the heart, and hinder it from mounting on the wings of devotion, fervent desire, and aspiration, towards heaven. I have often been present at an entertainment, and greatly enjoyed it, without observing or suspecting at the time, that my heart had become attached to some earthly object; but this I afterwards discovered with alarm, when it would fain have soared aloft in communion with God. Often, too, does one man sport with another, as the children are doing with this bird, and, though with no bad intention, but rather with a wish to please, seriously injure his religious character.

Happy the man who can cast off these bonds, and more and more disengage himself from worldly satisfactions; but oh! how blessed that soul which seeks its peace and joy, pleasure and delight, in God; tastes a few drops of His sweetness, and forgets, in the fruition of them, even the lawful pleasures of the world!

## 86. The Center

Continuing, Gotthold said: God is a center to the soul; and, just as in a circle, what is nearest the center is subject to least motion, so the closer the soul is to God, the less the movement and agitation to which it is exposed. Make the experiment upon a level area: sink a staff into the ground, attach a line to it, and around it as a center describe a circle of considerable extent; then bid some friend walk round the circle, while you do the same round another drawn at a shorter distance from the staff. You will find that your friend will have to walk long and fast to complete his task, but that a few steps will be enough for yours. It is the same with the soul. The greater its distance from God and spiritual and heavenly things, the wider the circuit it will have to make, the faster it will have to speed without knowing why,

and the more will it seek, but be unable to find rest. He, however, who, by devotion and faith, love and resignation, keeps as near as possible to God, finds that which his heart desires.

## 87. Dust

On an excursion into the country during the hot days of summer, Gotthold discovered that the clothes of the party were thickly covered with dust, which they had not perceived as it fell, but which now gave them trouble enough to brush and shake off. From this occurrence, said he, let us reap a useful admonition on the subject of sin and its properties. At the present season, when the weather is fine and undisturbed by showers, dust is easily raised, and falls plentifully. In like manner it is, when flesh and blood enjoy fair weather and sunshine, that sinful lusts are most apt to be excited, and drop most thickly in actual sins.

As dust consists of many minute particles, and falls imperceptibly, so that we scarcely perceive until we are bespread with it; so do many small sins combine to form a great one, which is called habit and security, and is the nearest stage to hell.

As dust injures clothes, and sometimes sticks so fast that it can by no means be removed from them, and as no one likes it, but labors, as we are now doing, to brush it off; even so sin makes us hateful in the sight of God, and disreputable in that of men, – so that we ought justly to take all pains to purge our conscience and amend our life.

No one who travels in weather like this can escape the dust; and just as little, upon the pilgrimage of this transitory life, can any boast of being unsullied by sin.

In fine, as the dust settles and lies as quietly as if it had no existence, but is stirred and raised by the slightest breath of wind; so it sometimes seems as if sin no longer dwelt with in us, but was vanquished and annihilated, and we freed from all restraint to serve God in a pure and blameless life. No

sooner does opportunity occur, than sin makes its appearance, and we discover that we have much more of the world in our hearts than we had ever supposed.

Alas! Thou righteous God, how abominable and defiled in Thy most holy sight are my garments and walk! No doubt, from day to day I brush the dust away; but ah, me! how little good it does! my Father! forgive me, and do Thou Thyself cleanse and purge me, granting grace that my walk may be habitually circumspect, and that, at last, I may enter pure and unsullied into Thy city.

## 88. The Swarm of Bees

A swarm of bees had flown from a neighbor's warden into that of Gotthold, and settled on a young tree. From this he took occasion to observe: These visitors cannot have come over to us for nothing, and, if we please to reflect, they may give us a useful lesson, and thereby pay for their quarters. In my opinion, the device of a swarm of bees hanging upon a branch, and with the motto, "I will never forsake thee," would happily represent the Christian Church and their love to Jesus. The whole swarm, as is well known, is governed by a monarch, exercising an authority, not of coercion, but love; and so strong is the reciprocal attachment of the little honey birds to their prince, that they quit the hive with him, and follow and never leave him. When he flies, they do the same; when he alights, they fasten to him; if he remove, they hasten after him; and if, by some accident, his wings be injured, and he fall to the ground, they fall upon and cover him, as I have seen with my own eyes.

It is the same with the church of the saints: they have one only head, Jesus; and on Him their whole heart is set, and their whole soul depends. Willingly and cheerfully they follow whithersoever He leads. Their common motto is, "Jesus, I will never leave Thee." They are all animated by His Spirit, and governed by His love; their very essence is fellowship with their Lord and with each other. Let us therefore endeavor to be found in this



society. The whole of Christianity is comprised in three things – to believe, to love, and to obey Jesus. These are things, however, which we must be learning all our life.

Alas, Jesus! when shall my love to Thee equal that of the bees to their king! Ask of me the question once asked of Peter<sup>5</sup>, and I must needs answer Thee with sorrow and tears; for my heart bears witness that my love is still so weak as scarcely to deserve the name.

I love Thee, it is true; but what am I to Thee, or what proportion does my love bear to Thy deserts? I have but one consolation, that the will is here. When I say,

“I love Thee,” I say it with sorrow and tears; but when I say, “I would that I loved Thee with all my heart, and soul, and strength,” I say it with joy and confidence, for I say it with truth. Dearest Savior! pierce my heart with the fiery darts of Thy love; force Thy way into its inmost chambers; sink into the depths of my soul, and let both heart and soul blaze and swell with love to Thee.

## 89. The Withered Flowers

Gotthold, seeing some withered flowers strewed upon the table, thought with himself: Like these are the pleasures and pomps of this world, which quickly pass away, and have no stability! On further reflection, it seemed to him that such a flower might also image forth a heart exhausted with sorrow and care, and he exclaimed: Alas! how many withered and aching hearts there are in these disastrous times! How many pious Christians, who can scarcely stand erect for sorrow, but hang the head like drooping flowers! How many thousand thousand tears are daily shed over afflicted Christendom! How many anxious sighs are wafted to God in heaven! And yet the wicked world, secure and reckless, gives no heed to them, but wrongs the poor children of God, and laughs the while, yea crushes and vexes the hearts of Christians without remorse. But as the vapors which ascend from

the earth, descend to it again in rain and wind, thunder and lightning, even so the mournful sighs and wailings of the godly will one day turn into fire and brimstone, and fall upon the heads of their enemies. Meanwhile, ye whose hearts are sad and heavy, moderate your grief, and be not too greatly troubled. God in heaven attends to your tears and lamentations. The whole creation sighs in concert with you. Methinks I see the holy angels weeping for all the grief and anguish, wrongs and miseries, with which your hearts are overwhelmed. But God will help. He will not leave the righteous to suffer for ever. Lift up your hanging head, and know that your salvation draweth nigh. Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.<sup>6</sup> Oh, my God! comfort all sorrowful and troubled hearts, and then mine will not be forgotten.

## 90. The Bee Made a Prey

Standing one day before a beehive, Gotthold observed with delight how the little honey birds departed and arrived, and from time to time returned home laden with the spoils of the flowers. Meanwhile a great yellow hornet – that wolf among the bees – came buzzing up, in eager quest of a prey. As it was eventide, and the bees, after the heat of the day, had settled about the mouth of the hive to breathe the cool air, it was amusing to observe that their fierce adversary lacked courage to attack their combined host and serried ranks. True, he often advanced for the purpose; but, seeing how densely and compactly they were sitting, was forced to retreat empty-handed. At last, a bee, somewhat belated, arrived by itself, and on this straggler he instantly seized, fall with it to the earth, and dealt with it at his pleasure.

Gotthold thought with himself: How excellent a thing is unity and concord! If this little bee, which had probably ventured further, and for that reason reached home later than the rest, had formed one of the united swarm, it would not have fallen into the enemy's hands. How comes it, then, that we

men reflect so little upon the danger of discord? Never are the assaults of our spiritual foe so successful as when he finds us disunited by variance and envy. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.<sup>7</sup> Help us, Lord Jesus, to have the same love, and to be of one accord, of one mind, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,<sup>8</sup> that the God of love and of peace may be with us,<sup>9</sup> and that the infernal robber may gain no advantage over us.

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1. Rev. 19:8.↩
2. Rom. 8:14.↩
3. 1 Cor. 15:28.↩
4. Gen. 32:10.↩
5. John 21:26.↩
6. Luke 17:7, 8.↩
7. Psalm 133:1.↩
8. Phil. 2:2, and Eph. 4:3.↩
9. 2 Cor. 13:11↩

## 91. The Stubborn Tree

The majority of Christians, proceeded Gotthold, resemble the stock which strikes from below the graft, wastes its sap upon wild, branches, and permits the adopted ones to wither. They point their thoughts chiefly to earthly things, which efface Christ and heaven from their memories. The love of temporal possessions, luxury, pomp of dress, science, art, falsehood, enmity, hypocrisy, and other such things, shoot and grow and gather strength from day to day, as any one may see who but looks upon recent times.

Godliness, on the contrary, so far from increasing, gradually declines. The Lord Jesus, with His precious merits, saving Gospel, and holy and harmless life, is torn and uprooted from the heart, and no longer held in esteem<sup>1</sup>. But sorrow and woe be to the Christian in whose heart Christ does not take root and grow, flourish, and bear fruit! As a barren and corrupt tree, he has nothing to expect but the axe of the Divine wrath, and the fire that is not quenched.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Jesus! cleave my heart with Thy law; engraft Thyself deep into it by faith; bind it fast to Thee by love; govern and change it by Thy Spirit and grace; and keep it by Thy power unto holy fruitfulness here, and eternal blessedness hereafter.

## 92. The Sun

In a company of pious persons the sun happened to become the subject of conversation, when one of them observed: Day by day God maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good.<sup>3</sup> But, alas the evil regard it as little

as do the brutes, and even the good are far from giving it the attention it deserves. Of those who live beneath the sun, how few there are whom the sight of this most glorious orb incites to the praise and love of its Almighty Creator!

Seneca tells us of a voluptuary, who for a long course of years had never seen either its rising or its setting; for in the evening, when it set, his eyes were already closed with wine, and in the morning, when it rose, he had not slept out his sleep. This person, methinks, might have found many a match in our own days, and even among those who bear the Christian name. And yet, how noble a miracle of the omnipotence, goodness, and wisdom of God, is the sun, and how immense a blessing to mankind and the whole visible creation! In this light the Savior presents it to us in the words above quoted, designating it, not without cause, "His Sun."

Gotthold thereupon remarked: You have said what is true, but permit me to add: The almighty, benign, and wise Creator, has in this marvelous orb stamped a magnificent image of Himself, As a philosopher once observed, the sun is a visible Deity, and the Deity a visible sun. Viewed through a powerful telescope, it appears like a vast and ever-heaving ocean of ascending vapors, or like molten brass boiling in vast cauldrons, and emitting smoke mingled with light and fire. It is hence inferred that it is not merely the source of natural light, but likewise the origin of all prolific power, and, so to speak, the heart of nature and the soul of the world. And mark, such also is our God. He is a fountain forever overflowing with good, and good alone, – a delectable fire, forever burning, – a charming light, forever shining, – an ever-living, ever-active and prolific Being, from whom all things originally derive existence.

## **93. Second Mediation on the Sun**

Let us, however, further reflect, that God's children ought likewise to be His followers, and so, mortal deities and suns upon the earth. The compassion of the Lord is new every morning.<sup>4</sup>

Every morning does the sun rise, and rejoice to run his course; and with the same daily regularity ought the child of God to renew his purpose of ministering advice and succor to all about him; and, after the manner of his God, have more readiness to give than another to receive. It is impossible for the sun to be without light, and quite as impossible for a true Christian to be destitute of love, gentleness, alacrity to serve, and the desire to do good.

Lord Jesus! Thou art the sun and joy of my heart. If there be in me any light, ability, readiness of will, it is all from Thee. As God sheds His light, and exerts His influence through the sun, so dost Thou through me. I lay claim to no goodness of my own; but implore of Thee mercifully to forgive me for so often obstructing Thine, and darkening Thy light with my shadow.

## 94. The Weed

One day Gotthold saw a nettle growing in a flower border, and, on attempting to pull it up, found that he brought with it a quantity of the soil, of which, with its many roots and fibers, it had taken a firm hold. It is the same, he inwardly thought, with our conversion. Where God would extirpate the plant of sin from our hearts, alas! how strong the hold it has taken! and with how many roots of evil concupiscence it has fastened and entwined itself on every side! The consequence is inevitable – part of the heart must come with it; by which I mean, that it cannot be torn up without pain, anguish, and sorrow. But what does that matter? Weeds which are only removed from the surface, shoot again; and unless they are thoroughly extirpated, it is not safe to plant flowers or herbs in their place. Vain, therefore, is the attempt to make ourselves good by a forced and unsteady resolution,

while we retain the love of evil in our breast; for that is only waiting a favorable season and opportunity to shoot afresh.

My God! do Thou Thyself extirpate the root of bitterness from my heart! Use any means which seems good in Thy sight for this purpose; it may wound the sinful flesh, but better temporal than eternal pain.

## 95. The Double Flowers

Being in a garden, Gotthold was shown some blue and yellow violets which were bearing double flowers, and were therefore regarded as something rare. He remarked, however, that in proportion as they had gained in show, they had lost in fragrance, as compared with the single, and began:

How comes it to pass that generally the most showy and pompous plants are surpassed in other qualities by the more humble and unpretentious? The roses, which, on account of their numerous petals, are called centifoils, are no doubt beautiful to the eye, but are excelled in fragrance by those which have much fewer. Some prefer the water obtained from the wild rose to that which is distilled from the best of the centifoils; and every one knows that the proud imperial crown and gaudy tulip are far less fragrant than the violet, and many of its sister plants that creep upon the ground.

The same rule obtains among men. Where there is much show, there is never much power; where great consequence in the world's eyes, very little in God's. Nay (and this I would not dare to affirm, were it not declared by Him whom no man may gainsay), that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God.<sup>5</sup> Those men who are great and eminent for their learning and wisdom, their superior talents, vast fortunes, and lofty honors, are too often, like these double flowers, destitute of the fragrance of godliness, and the strength of love. For not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but the foolish, and base, and despised things of this world, are those which God hath chosen.<sup>6</sup> How comes it, then, that we are all so anxious to be great, and rich, and

honorable, though God is pleased to show forth His power in the meek, and poor, and humble? Better be humble and bear much fruit, than exalted and bear none. My God, I ask not of Thee the leaves of external consequence; I will be content to continue simple, lowly, and plain, if Thou wilt only give me grace to serve Thee and my neighbor. Outward pomp withers like a flower, but inward worth lasts even after death.

## 96 – The Pike

Strolling along the banks of a pond, Gotthold observed a pike basking in the sun, and so pleased with the sweet and soothing rays as to forget itself and the danger to which it was exposed. Thereupon a boy approached, and with a snare formed of horse hair, and fastened to the end of a rod, which he skilfully cast over its head, pulled it in an instant out of the water.

Ah, me! said Gotthold, with a deep sigh, how evidently do I here behold shadowed forth the danger of my poor soul! When the beams of temporal prosperity play upon us to our heart's desire, so grateful are they to corrupt flesh and blood, that, immersed in sordid pleasure, luxury, and security, we lose all sense of spiritual danger, and all thought of eternity. In this state many are, in fact, suddenly snatched away, to the eternal ruin of their souls.

Oh, my God! Vouchsafe to me Thy grace, that I may learn to rejoice as though I rejoiced not, and buy as though I possessed not, and use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away.<sup>7</sup> In the midst of pleasures and enjoyments, let me still feel, like the Psalmist, that the best of all is to draw near unto Thee<sup>[^B2]</sup> and may I never forget Thy fear. Break, also, the snares with which Satan endeavors to make a prey of my soul, but which, in my misery, I cannot see; and for this I shall laud and praise Thee in eternity.

## 97. The Vine

Visiting a person who was in deep affliction and sorrow, Gotthold was told by the family that he was in the garden. Thither he followed, and found



him employed in clearing a vine of its superfluous leaves. After a friendly salute, he inquired what he was doing. "I find," was the reply, "that, owing to the abundant rain, this vine is overgrown with wood and leaves, which prevents the sun from reaching and ripening the grapes. I am therefore pruning part of them away, that it may bring its fruit to maturity."

Gotthold rejoined: And do you find that in this operation the vine resists and opposes you? If not, why are you displeased that a gracious God should do to you what your vine must not be displeased that you do to it? You prune off the superfluous foliage in order that it may bear the better fruit; and God takes away your temporal blessings and earthly comforts, in order that faith may produce its noble fruits of love, humility, patience, hope, and prayer, and these larger, and fairer, and sweeter than before. Let them talk as they please: When a man has a superfluity of all things, and is a total stranger to the cross, the Sun of Righteousness, with its gracious rays, can scarcely reach the heart; and hence his Christianity usually bears only the harsh and acrid fruits of hypocrisy, pride, unkindness, and implacability. Let God, therefore, do with you as He will; He will do you no harm. You are now stripping the vine of its leaves; in spring you hoed it, planted layers, pruned the suckers, and bound the branches. My friend, you are yourself a branch on the spiritual Vine, which is the Lord Jesus. God is the dresser, and He well knows that, without His grace and care, He can look for no good at your hands. This is the reason why He employs contempt to lay you in the earth, trials to prune, affliction to restrain, and poverty to strip you of your leaves. He intends it all to make His grace sweeter to you, and your heart sweeter to Him.

My God! withdraw not from me Thy care, otherwise I shall grow wild and corrupt. Prune, bind, and strip me as Thou wilt; my comfort shall be, that Thou canst never mean it for evil.

## **98. The Burning-Glass**

Gotthold was present where a party of friends were amusing themselves with an artificially-cut glass, which concentrated the rays of the sun, and so not only exploded powder, but kindled straw, and even cloth and hardwood. Let this, said he, remind us, for our good, of opportunity to sin; for that is a means by which many a cold log (I mean heart) has been set on fire and excited to its ruin. Our eyes, which in many respects resemble this instrument, are sometimes justly called the heart's burning-glass, because they catch the opportunities to sin, and thereby infect the heart, and give occasion to carry vicious inclinations into effect. This was the case even in Paradise. For the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes; and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.<sup>8</sup> The same thing likewise happened to King David when he beheld Bathsheba in the bath:<sup>9</sup> and if the wife of Potiphar had closed these windows, passion would never have gained the mastery in her breast.<sup>10</sup>

If, therefore, you would avoid sin, avoid all opportunities of committing it; and as this glass cannot burn unless it be kept still and motionless, so the moment you find your eyes fixed on an opportunity of sinning, recollect the danger to which your heart is exposed, and escape with the utmost speed from the ruin threatening your soul.

My God! take me under Thy protection, and grant that my eyes may never lust, and so may never mislead my heart, nor set it on fire with sinful passion.

## 99. The Grafts

Inspecting some young grafts on the stock of a fruit tree, which were shown him by a friend, and which had grown with extraordinary vigor, and reached in a short time to a great height, Gotthold observed: This also is one of the miracles of nature, which we have daily before our eyes, but seldom contemplate or improve to our edification.

A wild stock has all its branches pruned away, and is hewn down to a span's length. It is then split, has foreign shoots inserted into it, and is afterwards bound; and not only does it adopt the strange shoots, and nourish them with its sap and vigor, but even permits them to gain the mastery so far as to make it forget its wildness, and bear beautiful and delicious fruit. Now, I say that of that fruit we are not worthy to taste, if we do not here gratefully acknowledge the marvelous goodness of God, and take occasion to draw some reflections that may make us better Christians.

Our heart is a wild and untamed stock, which God plants in the garden of his Church, hews down, and, by repentance, reduces to despair of its own faculties and powers. He then engrafts into it Christ Jesus, his beloved son – that noble Branch from the root of Jesse<sup>11</sup>, that through Him we may be filled with the fruits of righteousness<sup>12</sup>, and called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified<sup>13</sup>. Let us therefore see well to it, that neither presumptuous sins, nor the temptations of Satan or the world, be ever permitted to break off or uproot this noble shoot from our hearts. Let us, by diligent reflection and self-examination, ascertain that Christianity is growing within us, – in other words, that our faith, charity, patience, and godliness, are on the increase.

## 100. The Orphans

A good man had died in the bloom of life, leaving behind him several infant children. The plentiful tears of the widow went deep into Gotthold's heart, nor less the simple sorrow of the orphans, who were all the more objects of pity that they did not understand the cause they had to weep. He too sighed, and, with tears in his eyes, exclaimed: Thou marvelous God! how contrary are Thy doings to what seem good to us! Is not this disconsolate widow like a vine whose prop the wind has taken away and leveled with the earth? What better is her household than a low hedge, which every one will think himself at liberty to overstep? What else the young orphans but flowers growing in the wild forest, and on which all the beasts will trample? But

pardon me. Thou faithful God! that, from tender compassion to these disconsolate mourners, I venture to speak thus boldly with Thee. Thou must respect Thy name, and have opportunity to show that Thou art the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows.<sup>14</sup> Show it then, here. Thy counsel is always best.

The gardener does not scruple to hew down the old tree, that the young ones growing around, but which were previously injured by its shade, may have room to thrive. Even so the life of parents would often prove their children's ruin. But when the shade is removed, there is nothing save the open heaven above their heads; and so they learn to fear, and to put their trust in Thee, and from Thee alone to expect blessing, protection, and defense. Heavenly Father! Thou wilt, no doubt, do more for these orphans than their earthly parent, with all his affection, could ever have accomplished. Yes, my God, in them, and' in their much afflicted mother, glorify now Thy name!

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1. Dan. 9:26.↵
  2. Matt. 3:10.↵
  3. Matt. 5:45.↵
  4. Lam. 3:23.↵
  5. Luke 15:16.↵
  6. 1 Cor. 1:26.↵
  7. 1 Cor. 7:30, 31.; Psalm 73:28.↵
  8. Gen. 3:6.↵
  9. Sam. 11:2.↵
  10. Gen. 39:7.↵
  11. Isaiah 11:1.↵
  12. Phil 1:11.↵
  13. Isaiah 61:3.↵

14. Psalm 68:5.↩

# 101. Soul Venders

At fairs, said Gotthold, all sorts of wares, even men and their souls, are exposed for sale. Nay, what is of all things the most strange, there are many who will sell their souls for less than they will any other commodity. The traitor Judas consented to sell his Lord and Master for thirty pieces of silver. Rightly viewed, it was his own soul which he sold; and, compared with the present world, the price which the miserable man obtained was not inconsiderable. For, as I believe, there are many who, to gain or put into their purse thirty pieces of silver, would, if it were possible, sell their souls thirty times over. If you doubt this, reflect that as often as a man possesses himself of any object by unjust and ungodly means, he burdens his conscience, sins against his God, and, as far as he can, virtually sells his poor soul for base lucre.

Miserable creatures that we are! how comes it to pass that in worldly traffic we weigh and measure so correctly, and show ourselves so shrewd and prudent, but never think of weighing temporal things with eternal, or measuring transitory gains with everlasting losses, and in matters which concern our salvation, are as stupid as the brutes? Were I to ask an unrighteous man to sell his heart, he would instantly reply in the negative; and though I were to offer for it a hundred thousand ducats, he would still insist that he was not so great a fool as to part with his heart for money, inasmuch as, without a heart, he could not live, and without life money would be useless. Oh, fellowman! if temporal life be too precious to be sold for gold, why for gold do you part with your soul and life eternal? Why do you reckon that so worthless which appears to God of such inestimable value, that He consented to redeem it with the blood of His only and well-beloved Son? I, for my part, agree with the holy apostle, who says: Godliness, with contentment, is great gain: for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.

## 102. The Incognito

Heavenly Father, proceeded Gotthold, Thy prophet declares that blessed is the man that considereth the poor.[^Cm] One would imagine that little consideration is necessary, when we see before us the sufferer's misery. The world rushes past, and thinks, Who knows what a vagabond he is? Who knows but he has brought all this wretchedness upon his own head? I, however, know that the great and mighty have sometimes disguised themselves in mean attire, in order to discover the true character of their dependents; I know, too, that my Sovereign, Jesus, conceals himself beneath the beggar's cloak, that He may put my heart to the test, and ascertain whether He or money is dearer to it.

No, no, my Savior, Thou must not thus pass me by; disguise Thyself as Thou wilt, I still recognize Thee. I thank Thee for having now deemed me worthy to knock at my door, and apply to me for relief. I will take to heart the penury of this forsaken beggar, and relieve him to the utmost of my means. Ah, my Savior! vouchsafe to me not only to do, but also to will;<sup>1</sup> and grant that my poor doing and willing may be mercifully accepted of Thee. This time it is Thou who comest before my door; ere long it will be my turn to knock at Thine. Oh, never let me find the door of mercy or heaven shut against me!

## 103. The Brook

Returning from the fields, a party of laborers one evening seated themselves beside a little brook, and not only drank of its fresh and cooling water, but used it to wash off the sweat and dust from their persons. Gotthold, seeing them as he passed, thought with himself: My God, how sweet and pleasant to me is the pure stream of Thy goodness, which this brook adumbrates to my view! However circumspect I may suppose my walk during

the day to have been, I yet cannot wholly avoid contracting various defilements; and these I always see best when evening brings leisure for meditation, and I examine what the work of the day has been.

But the stream of Thy heart-refreshing grace is then my resort. In it I wash and cleanse away my sins, and find solace and refreshment for my weary soul. And as this brook not merely washes off impurities, but overwhelms them, so that they can no longer be found, even so Thy divine mercy, and the stream of my Savior's blood, not only purge away, but extinguish my sins, sweeping them into the depths of the sea, where through all eternity they shall be remembered no more.

Lord Jesus, Thou fountain of life! Thy grace is my consolation, Thy overflowing goodness fresh water to my troubled heart. Would that I had as many tongues as there are drops in this stream! Their only work should be to extol Thine incomprehensible love and goodness.

## 104. The Bad Crop

Owing to the severe drought, and long want of rain, the crop (in 1661) was very deficient, especially in the early kinds of grain; the greater part of which, being scarce half a span in length, could not be mown, and, having been scorched and destroyed, was besides cornless.

This gave rise to general complaints, both among town and country people, so that two men rarely met without manifesting their despondency, and expressing themselves in most unbecoming terms. Gotthold thereupon observed: I am now sensible of the truth of the proverb, which says, that if God were to be so complacent as to carry us on His back to Rome, we would not thank Him for His pains, if He did not also set us down upon an easy-chair. How comes it to pass that, in the present dearth, there are so few who thankfully reflect upon the rich and plentiful seasons of which we have had so long a succession? I cannot recollect of having then heard nearly so much praise and thanksgiving for the abundance of the Divine blessing, as I



now hear complaints on account of its deficiency. It really is a serious fault to reckon the blessings of God so small, and His punishments so great and so far above our deserts; whereas it is His goodness and our sins which exceed all weight and number, while His punishments and our deserts are exceedingly small. Only compute, I beseech you, and you will soon find that the abundance of former seasons would have more than sufficed to compensate for the deficiency of the present, if we had only dealt prudently, and not squandered it with so lavish a hand. Weigh, likewise, the magnitude of our sin and guilt on the one hand, and God's right and power to punish us on the other; and who can deny that, were He to cause the harvest to misgive, and the grain to wither, not only for one, but every season, thus leaving us to pine for hunger, so far from wronging, He would only treat us as we have justly merited. Let us also reflect, for our comfort, that it is no difficult matter for Almighty God, who pardons the sins of the penitent, also to swell the little stores of the faithful, and even in the midst of dearth to satisfy them abundantly. O my God, Thou kind and gracious Master! give me, above all things, a heart easily contented, and able either to be poor or to be hungry, to abound or to suffer need.

## 105. The Orange Tree

In the garden of a man of rank, Gotthold was shown a young orange tree bearing fruit, part of which was almost ripe, and part still small and green. He was told that in warm countries, such as Spain and Italy, where it attains to its full height and perfection, the orange tree is found, so to speak, continually serving man; inasmuch as, at one and the same time, ripe fruit, and even blossom, may all be seen upon it.

He thereupon replied: It would be the same with our common apple and pear trees, were it not for the severity of the cold in winter. In spring, when they burst the bud, and are gradually adorned by nature with leaves and flowers and fruit, you may already discover the leaf and fruit buds with which they intend to gain our love and admiration in the year to come. In

harvest, too, when the foliage drops off, these remain as the hope of the following summer, and can be recognized and distinguished by the skillful gardener. From the inanimate creatures let us learn our duty. Nature continues in incessant action; and having once received from her omnipotent Creator the command to minister to man with her fertility, she never pauses, but works, germinates, and produces in succession, leaves, flowers, and fruits, to the utmost of her ability. And why should not we do the same, seeing that God has not only made and planted, but even watered us with the blood and Spirit of His dear Son, to the end that we may bear fruits of love and gratitude both to Him and our neighbor? There can be no doubt that in all the plants of righteousness which He has planted there is an ever active, forcing, and prolific power; for, in the remarkable words of the apostle, As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;<sup>2</sup> and again, The love of Christ constraineth us<sup>3</sup>. When they have performed one work of love, or borne one fruit of righteousness to the glory of God and the service of the brethren, they are already in spirit bearing fresh blossoms and pondering on others. Be it summer or winter, never do you find them without good fruit, or at least never without blossoms, leaves, and fruit-buds; by which I mean, holy and sincere desires and resolutions to advance God's glory, and be serviceable to mankind. They are partakers of the Divine nature<sup>4</sup>, and have the spirit and the mind of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus, my Lord! without Thee we can do nothing. Abide Thou in me, and I in Thee<sup>6</sup>, and then never shall I want either fruitfulness. or fruit.

## 106. The Dismantled House

Happening one day to pass a house, from which war and pestilence had swept away the inmates, whose roof and partitions had afterwards fallen, and which was now tottering to its ruin: Here, said Gotthold, we behold the fruits of our sins, which are what empty cities of their populations, and houses of their inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> And it is no wonder that God chases and expels

us from our mansions, when we refuse to have Him for our fellow lodger, and make screens of our walls, behind which to sin, as we fancy, in security.

The spectacle of this house, forsaken by man, and falling into ruin, shall now remind me of the wretchedness of that soul which, persevering in a course of sin and impenitence, God in righteous judgment forsakes. It is the haunt of the foul birds of night and hell, which fly in and out at their pleasure. All about it is crumbling to pieces, and preparing for everlasting destruction. The worst punishment which can be inflicted upon man in this present life, is when God withdraws from him the hand of grace, gives him up to a reprobate mind, and permits him to walk according to the inclinations of his wicked heart. In that case, Satan has gained the game, and bridle and saddles the steed to ride it at his pleasure. The man becomes a ball, which the devils toss from hand to hand, and plunge out of one sin into another. His mind is a forge, in which infernal spirits manufacture the works and weapons of darkness.

I now understand what is meant when the Lord our God exclaims: Woe to them when I depart from them.<sup>8</sup> And again: I have taken away my peace from this people, even loving-kindness and mercies.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, a difference between this house and a profligate given over to the power of hell: the one exhibits its miserable condition to the view of all who pass, whereas the spiritual wretchedness and ruin of the other are often disguised by temporal prosperity, and the success of his licentious projects. The danger is, however, all the greater, the more it escapes the notice both of himself and others.

Leave me not, then, neither forsake me, God of my salvation!<sup>10</sup> Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.<sup>11</sup> Let me not have my own will; withdraw not from me Thy watchful care. Let my soul continue at all times the habitation of TinSpirit. I would rather be deserted by the world, by health, by honor, by pleasure, by earthly blessings, by friends, by all, than by Thee and Thy grace.

## 107. Man and his Savior

What think you of our need of the Lord Jesus? said Gotthold. For my part, my soul is like a hungry and thirsty child, and I need His love and consolations for my refreshment; I am a wandering and lost sheep, and I need Him as a good and faithful Shepherd; my soul is like a frightened dove pursued by the hawk, and I need His wounds for a refuge; I am a feeble vine, and I need His cross to lay hold of and wind myself about; I am a sinner, and I need His righteousness; I am naked and bare, and need His holiness and innocence for a covering; I am in trouble and alarm, and I need His solace; I am ignorant, and I need His teaching; simple and foolish, and I need the guidance of His Holy Spirit. In no situation, and at no time, can I do without Him.

Do I pray? He must prompt and intercede for me. Am I arraigned by Satan at the Divine tribunal? He must be my Advocate. Am I in affliction? He must be my helper. Am I persecuted by the world? He must defend me. When I am forsaken. He must be my support; when dying, my life; when moldering in the grave, my resurrection.

Well, then, I will rather part with all the world, and all that it contains, than with Thee, my Savior; and, God be thanked! I know that Thou, too, art neither able nor willing to do without me. Thou art rich, and I am poor; Thou hast abundance, and I am needy; Thou hast righteousness, and I sins; Thou hast wine and oil, and I wounds; Thou hast cordials and refreshments, and I hunger and thirst. Use me then, my Savior, for whatever purpose and in whatever way Thou mayest require. Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel; fill it with Thy grace. Here is my sinful and troubled soul; quicken and refresh it with Thy love. Take my heart for Thine abode; my mouth, to spread the glory of Thy name; my love, and all my powers, for the advancement of Thy honor and the service of Thy believing people. And never suffer the steadfastness and confidence of my faith to abate, that so at all times I may be enabled from the heart to say: Jesus needs me, and I Him; and so we suit each other.

## **108. The Pearl Necklace**

A costly pearl necklace, just purchased for a young lady, was shown to Gotthold, and led him to say: In these days little attention is paid to the admonition of the holy apostle, who requires that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.<sup>12</sup> No female now abstains from wearing pearls, but she who has neither pearls to wear, nor money to buy them. And, considering the natural love of the sex for ornament, this might be allowed, under the condition that no lady should be entitled to wear pearls unless she could either make or take from them a subject of holy meditation. For example: the pearl, as most naturalists inform us, is the product of the dew of heaven; for, when the oyster sees the weather bright and clear, it is said to open its shells at the early dawn, while the dew is falling, and greedily to drink in the silver drops, which petrify within it, and afterwards, by their white and snowy luster, betray their celestial origin. In the same way ought our hearts to be eager and open to imbibe the dew of heavenly grace, when it drops at the preaching of the word.

## **109. Second Meditation on the Pearl Necklace**

Proceeding, Gotthold remarked: I cannot recollect having ever heard of any pious lady, whether old or young, who, at her departure from this world, cared to have her pearls and other ornaments about her. On the contrary, we read of a princess, who, on her death-bed, expressed her contempt for them, exclaiming, Away with such trash! and do Thou, Christ Jesus, adorn my soul with Thy royal robes!

Provide yourselves, therefore, with such pearls as may strengthen your soul at death, and adorn it in the sight of Jesus.

As pearls are strung upon a thread, and hung for ornament about the neck, so ought the Christian to string upon his memory those precious texts

of Scripture, which contain the kernel, sap, and strength of heavenly wisdom, that he may have them ready for use, both in life and death.

Above all, every time you decorate yourself with these bright and glistening jewels, remember that your soul ought to wear a similar ornament of virtue, godliness, and good behavior; otherwise the pearls will be ashamed of the vile object they are compelled to adorn.

My God! my pearls shall be my tears. Give me grace to shed them for sorrow at my sin, for joy at Thy goodness, and for desire after Thy heavenly felicity, and I shall ask for no other pearls.

## 110. The Foul Vessel

A drink was brought to Gotthold which tasted of the vessel in which it had been contained, and this led him to observe: We have here an emblem of our thoughts, words, and works. Our heart is defiled by sin, and hence a taint of sinfulness cleaves unfortunately to everything we take in hand; and although, from the force of habit, this may be imperceptible to us, it does not escape the eye of the omniscient, holy, and righteous God.

Yes, replied a pious man, who heard the observation, our wicked and ungodly hearts give us much to do. By the mouth of the prophet,<sup>13</sup> God exhorts us: Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; and, in compliance with the exhortation, I have for many years been occupied washing the unclean vessel with fervent prayers, floods of tears, constant struggles, new resolutions, and diligent attention and study of the Divine Word. Hitherto, however, I can find no trace of any good having been done. The stains are here and there so deeply fixed, that no washing avails to purge them out; and this often sinks me into despondency, and makes me imagine that my Christianity is not worth a straw.

One main reason, rejoined Gotthold, why God does not, in this present life, wholly cleanse the heart, and deliver it from original sin, is, that we may be preserved from pride, and, like weak and thirsty children, continu-

ally cling to the grace and wounds of the Lord Jesus. We must not on that account, however, despair of our Christianity, or suppose that, because it does not please ourselves, it is also displeasing to God. God is a most affectionate Father; and being aware that, in this world, His children will never be without weaknesses and sins, He exercises patience with them. Then, opening a work of Tauler, he read the following passage: Lord, Thou seest to the bottom of all hearts, and understandest all thoughts. Thou knowest well how willingly I would give back into Thy hands a pure and heavenly soul. All I have, however, is this foul vessel, full of filth and temptation: such as it is, I offer it to Thee. If it were better, to Thee I would still give it. All I ask is, that Thou wouldst wash it with Thy pure blood, and so make it meet to receive Thy holy influence.

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1. Phil. 2:13.↩
2. Rom. 8:14.↩
3. 2 Cor. 5:14.↩
4. 2 Peter 1:6.↩
5. 1 Cor. 2:16.↩
6. John 15:5.↩
7. Isaiah 6:11.↩
8. Hosea 9:12.↩
9. Jeremiah 16:5.↩
10. Psalm 27:9↩
11. Psalm 51:11↩
12. 1 Timothy 2:11.↩
13. Jeremiah 4:14.↩

## 111. A Strange Sea

On another occasion, Gotthold remarked that the world is like a great ocean, on which, strange to say, most of the mariners suffer shipwreck in calm and pleasant weather; whereas the storms and raging waves of trouble waft them to the haven of eternal bliss. Upon this ocean I too am steering my little bark. Be with me, my God! and guide me to the wished-for shore. It will matter little then, whether I sailed in calm and sunshine, or through storms and tempests.

## 112. The Entertainment

Gotthold was invited to an entertainment, and had the hope held out that he would meet with a friend whom he loved, and in whose society he took the greatest delight. On joining the party, however, he learned that, owing to some unforeseen occurrence, this friend was not to be present, and felt too much chagrined to take any share in the hilarity.

The circumstance afterwards led him into the following train of thought: The pious soul that sincerely loves and fervently longs for the Lord Jesus, experiences what I lately did. She seeks her Beloved in all places, objects, and events. If she find Him, who is happier? If she find Him not, who more disconsolate?

Ah! Lord Jesus, Thou best of Friends! Thou art the object of my love; my soul seeketh Thee; my heart longeth after Thee. What care I for the world, with all its pleasures and pomps, its power and glory, unless I find Thee in it? What care I for the daintiest food, the sweetest drinks, and the merriest company, unless Thou art present, and unless I can dip my morsel



in Thy wounds, sweeten my draught with Thy grace, and hear Thy pleasant words. Verily, my Savior, were I even in heaven, and did not find Thee there, it would seem to me no heaven at all. Wherefore, Lord Jesus I when I seek Thee with tears, sighs, yearnings of heart, and patient hope, hide not Thyself from me, but suffer me to find Thee! For, Lord! whom have I in the heaven but Thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.<sup>1</sup>

## 113. The Fruitful Tree

Passing a garden, Gotthold observed a pear-tree whose branches were bending to the ground, as if they would break with the weight of the fruit. On asking a friend, who was with him, What do you think it is which this tree needs? he was answered: A prop or two to support the overloaded boughs.

No, rejoined Gotthold, but hands to pluck, and baskets to contain the fruit. It presents to us a beautiful emblem of the Lord Jesus, our beloved Savior. He needs me, and I Him; and so we suit each other. Nor think it strange when I say that the Lord Jesus needs me. I mean that He needs me as this tree does baskets, or as the widow's cruse, which God had blessed, needed empty vessels to hold the oil<sup>2</sup>; or as the mother, whose breasts overflow, needs the child to suck the milk. Love constrains the Lord to seek me, as my wants do me to seek Him. He possesses all things – heaven, earth, and all which they contain; but these He does not need. What He needs is, souls and hearts, to replenish with His grace and Spirit, and bless with His salvation. mighty love, tender compassion, and mercy of our Savior! He, who needs nothing else, cannot do without sinful and wretched man.

## 114. The Harvest

Towards the fall of the year, a party of friends were taking a walk in the vicinity of a town, when one of them began and said: Alas! how all things are now rushing, as if down hill, towards the cold and gloomy winter! We no longer hear the voice of a single bird. The lark mourns to see the grain mown down and carted away, and the fields left to it all naked and bare.

To this Gotthold replied: The birds sing most in spring, and are silent in summer; and this, in my opinion, God has in His goodness ordained, in order that, while as yet we see the precious fruits of the earth only in their growth, and rejoice in them only in hope, the music of the feathered songsters may stir us up to praise Him. Afterwards, however, when we begin actually to enjoy His manifold bounties, and bear the precious grain in thousands of cartloads into our barns, the birds keep silence, as if they deemed it needless to remind us of our duty, because, amidst the profusion of the gifts, it was not possible to forget the Giver. Look around you, and on every hand you will see one load of grain carted away after another. Do you suppose that the bountiful Father who caused it to grow may hope to receive for each a hymn of praise and thanksgiving? And yet such a tribute is due to Him for every single ear, inasmuch as the whole combined skill and power of the human race could not, without His aid, have reared a single ear from the earth.

Holy God! would we but praise Thee, and love Thee, and live in obedience to Thy will, as long as Thou continuest Thy blessings to us, never would our hearts be empty of Thy love, our mouths of Thy praise, or our walk of Thy fear!

## **115. The Artificial Picture**

A man of rank possessed a piece of painting, which, when looked at as it lay extended upon a long table, showed only a few coarse strokes and confused patches of color; but when viewed through a glass, which was fixed at one end, beautifully and correctly portrayed a lady stretched upon the

ground, her arm resting upon a skull, and a book lying open before her, which she was reading, with tears in her eyes.

Gotthold, on the picture being shown to him, was greatly surprised, and said: I cannot but express the thoughts which arise in my mind. This picture, methinks, very aptly represents the Divine providence and all-wise government of the world. Viewed merely upon the surface, nothing can seem more jarring or disordered. It offends not only the heathen, but even Christians. The course of things is well described by Solomon: I turned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, they who contemplate the state of the world through the glass of the Word and of faith, speedily become convinced that a secret order runs through this apparent disorder; and, though previously unable to distinguish one form or object from another, soon discover that the wise and mighty hand of God has skilfully fitted all things into each other, and, amidst the thousand complicated changes which take place, keeps the course of His providence unchanged, – so that what we call Fortune, Accident, or Chance, is in reality nothing but the execution of His merciful, righteous, and immutable plans.

## 116. The Microscope

Two glasses were fitted by a friend into a little ivory box in such a way that any small object, like a midge or other insect, when put into it, and viewed through the smaller and upper glass, seemed of enormous size, and all its parts, however diminutive, were distinctly visible. If, however, the box was reversed, and the objects contemplated through the larger glass, they then appeared to shrink below the usual size.

Gotthold looked upon the contrivance with no ordinary pleasure, and said: I know not what better name to give this box than the magnifying-

glass. In my opinion, however, the hearts of the proud and hypocritical are of the same construction. When they contemplate what is their own, – their virtues and talents, – they see through a glass, which self-love has so artfully prepared that all seems of vast dimensions, and they imagine that they have good reason to boast and congratulate themselves upon their gifts. If, however, they have occasion to look at their neighbor and his good points, they turn the little box upside down, and all seems small and commonplace. They observe their own faults and vices through the diminishing glass, and reckon them very inconsiderable; while they contemplate their neighbor's from the opposite side, and so convert a midge into an elephant.

The greatest of all delusions in the world is that which man voluntarily practices upon himself, and which betrays him, with his eyes open, into pride, self-esteem, and contempt of others. You will own that the heart of the Pharisee, who looked upon himself as a mighty saint, and upon the publican as a brand fit for the burning, was of this description. That Pharisee, however, has left behind him a numerous offspring, and spread his line over the whole earth. In fact, I do not believe there exists the man who has not sometimes used such a box in the way we have described. This is the source of all the mischief in the world; for, by magnifying ourselves and diminishing our neighbor, we come to fancy that we ought to bear nothing, and be all things. It also breeds boasting, disdain, wrath, hatred, implacability, insolence, and the like; and therefore the Word of God reminds every man not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think,<sup>4</sup> and distinctly says: If any man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.<sup>5</sup>

My God, I perceive that it is self-love, and its offspring, self-deception, which shut the gates of heaven, and leads men, as if in a delicious dream, to hell. Oh, give me grace not to follow myself and my delusions, but Thee and Thy Word! It will then be impossible for me to go astray.

## 117. Tuning a Lute

One day Gotthold happened to find a friend tuning his lute, which proved a work of some labor. This led him to say:

The Christian may aptly be compared to such an instrument. A lute is made of common and soft timber, which has not itself, but the hand of the workman, to thank for fashioning it into what it is. In like manner, a Christian has no distinction above other men, save that the hand of a merciful God has made of him a vessel of grace. As a lute requires to be strung, and skilfully tuned and touched, so must the finger of God furnish the heart of the Christian with good thoughts, and then adjust them to the honor of His name. However beautiful a lute may be, it is easily put out of tune, and therefore needs continual care. And so does our Christianity. Disattuned by the devil, the wicked world, and our own perverse will, it would sound harshly, did not the gracious hand of the Most High daily regulate and correct it.

At the same time, let us remember what duties are ours. If we labor to tune a lute, that its sound may not grate upon human ears, why do we not take equal pains to harmonize and regulate our thoughts, words, and works, that they may not offend the sharp eyes and ears of the Most High? We hear at once, if but a single string is out of tune; and yet we often neither mark nor care for the discord between our life and walk, and God's holy commandments. Men instantly tell us of the false note in our music; and let us also, my friend, admonish each other, when we perceive a flaw or discord in our Christianity.

Lord Jesus! tune, regulate, and mold my life, and make it consonant with Thine. It is true that my strings are weak, and cannot sustain so high a pitch as Thy perfection. I console, myself, however, with the thought, that, as in this lute there are higher and lower clefs, so among Christians there are both the strong and the weak; and Thou art satisfied with both, provided only they are not false.

## 118. The Bee

Gotthold saw a bee flutter for a while around a pot of honey, and at last light upon it, intending to feast to its heart's content. It, however, fell in, and being besmeared in every limb, miserably perished.

On this he mused, and said: It is the same with temporal prosperity, and that abundance of wealth, honor and pleasure, which are sought for by the world as greedily as honey is by the bee. A bee is a happy creature so long as it is assiduously occupied in gathering honey from the flowers, and by slow degrees accumulating a store of it. When, however, it meets with a hoard like this, it knows not what to do, and is betrayed into ruin. In like manner, many a man shows himself godly, humble, pious, so long as he is obliged, from day to day, to earn his bread with the sweat of his brow, and constant difficulty and toil. Let some extraordinary turn of fortune, however, suddenly put him in possession of great wealth, and it becomes a stair by which he descends to the pit of destruction. A bee perishing like this, in a pot of honey, might be painted with the motto. Abundance is my ruin.

What, then, my God! ought I to desire? A great fortune might prove to me a great misfortune, and abundance issue in eternal want. Grant me grace, that, like a bee, I may diligently labor in Thy fear, and not in vain, for the portion of bread convenient for me. In other respects, be Thou my wealth, and then I shall be exempt from danger.

## 119. Heaven

Meditating upon the misery of the times, and the great disorder occasioned by the war in all places and among all ranks, Gotthold walked forth into the country in a desponding mood. Reaching the summit of a hill, which commanded an extensive view of the neighboring country, he tarried for a while, and indulged in the following train of thought:

I here behold cities, villages, and fields; forests, parks, and meadows; hedges, rocks, cattle, birds, and men; – but all of them, as it were, comprehended by heaven, and enclosed within its circle. Look where I may, heaven

is still the last and furthest object on which my eye must rest. In the same way, I may be assured, that whatever is or happens in the world, be it good or bad, is subjected to the heavenly government and providence. This is the vast hoop which, amidst the sore destruction and manifold strifes which prevail, keeps the world together. With this belt, my all-powerful, and wise, and gracious God encircles all things. Just as no one can find a spot of earth on which he has not the heaven for a roof above and a fence around him, so just as little can any one withdraw himself from that divine and universal governance which disposes all things to the glory of the Most High, and the salvation of the righteous. Why then art thou cast down, my soul! or why disquieted within me? If things go strangely in the world, the strangest thing is this, that a divine order runs through the worst confusion of human affairs. Let them go as they will, they cannot go otherwise than as God wills. You may meet with much to offend, distress, and harm you; but only look a little further, and you will see the heavens beyond, as the last object in sight, governing, comprehending, and terminating all the rest. It matters little what may be the course things take, if it only tend to heaven. Why should you be offended because, in times of insecurity, war, and rapine like these, God does not translate you to the better world in an easy chair? Let it suffice you to know, that all His paths are mercy and truth,<sup>6</sup> and all terminate in heaven at last.

## 120. Tears

Seeing a widow, of whose piety he was aware, but not less of her poverty and affliction, seated in the garden behind her humble dwelling, and there frequently raising her hands to heaven, uttering one deep sigh after another, and accompanying these with floods of tears, Gotthold could not help wondering why they did not drain the fountain which supplied them.

He could scarce refrain from weeping in sympathy, and called to mind the words of the son of Sirach: Do not the tears run down the widow's

cheek, and is not her cry against him that causeth them to fall? After gazing for a while, he approached somewhat nearer to the place, and was perceived. At the sight of him the widow instantly blushed, dried her eyes, and endeavored to conceal that she had been addressing such anxious supplications to God, and pouring out her afflicted heart in his presence.

Gotthold, however, remarked: I call to mind the words of the prophet: A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted, because they were not. But thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for thy works shall be rewarded.<sup>7</sup> That your heart is crushed with anguish, the many tears which I have seen you shed forbid me to doubt; for what are tears but a fluid which some peculiar grief wrings from a troubled heart? And even as the strongest essence is extracted by fire from the finest herbs and flowers, so may tears be said to be the sap which the heat of sorrow and the cross draw from the afflicted heart, and carry off by the channel of the eyes. Be of good cheer, then, and know for certain that the Lord hears your supplication, and puts your tears into His bottle. Now you are sowing in tears; hereafter you shall reap in joy.<sup>8</sup> The tears you shed will be changed into wine, which you will drink with inconceivable delight in heaven; or they will become pearls, and adorn your crown of honor in the life eternal.

When she heard these words, the poor widow wept more bitterly than before, and said, with mournful voice: Truly, if every Christian receives a measure which he must fill with his tears, large is the one which has been allotted to me. But I am content that it should be so, and thank my faithful God, who, after my much weeping and bitter sorrow, never fails to apply some solace to my burdened heart.

My God! vouchsafe to me also this grace of tears. They mitigate grief, break and soften the heart; nor wilt Thou behold them flow without fatherly compassion.

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1. Psalm 73:25, 26.↵
  2. 1 Kings 17:12.↵
  3. Eccles. 9:11.↵



4. Rom. 12:3.↵
5. Gal. 6:3.↵
6. Psalm 25:10.↵
7. Jer. 32:15, 16.↵
8. Psalm 126:5.↵

## 121. The Ants

By chance Gotthold happened to come upon an ant-hill, and entertained himself for a while with observing the assiduous labors of these little insects. He recollected the words of Solomon: Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat, and gathereth her food in the harvest.<sup>1</sup>

As he further mused, he said: My God, no doubt there are many who equal these little creatures in their pains and care to collect and provide temporal supplies. But how comes it to pass that we are so slothful in laying up a store for the wants of our souls? Ants often rather drag than carry splinters and straws larger than themselves; and so do the children of men frequently burden themselves with a load of care greatly beyond their strength, and, if well considered, quite as worthless as a straw. It is to this the prophet alludes when he says: Surely they are disquieted in vain. He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.<sup>2</sup> They think little of eternal things, and devote scarce a fragment of their time to meditation upon that time when time shall be no more. Knowing, as I well do, that a winter will one day overtake me, in which Thou wilt either appoint for me sore trials, or summon death to approach, it shall now be my incessant employment to collect and store in my heart the precious grains of Scripture texts, in order that, when all else is consumed, my soul may never lack a supply of consolation.

## 122. The Strange Bargain

In a well-known city there lived two merchants – one of them a skillful arithmetician, and generally an able man; the other, inexperienced in figures, and by no means a match for the former in talent. They made the following bargain: The first sold a horse to the second; but, instead of fixing a definite sum of money as the price, they agreed that it should be regulated by the thirty-two nails with which the four shoes were fastened to the animal's hoofs, and should be paid in millet – one grain being given for the first nail, two for the second, four for the third, eight for the fourth, and so on; that is, doubling the number at every nail.

The buyer was at first delighted at purchasing a fine charger for what he fancied a very moderate price; but, when the account came to be settled, he found that the quantity of grain which, by the terms of the agreement, he was required to pay, was enormous. In fact, he would have been reduced to beggary, if some sensible friends had not interposed, and procured a dissolution of the bargain.

Gotthold, who heard the story, observed: Well does it exemplify the wiles of Satan. By promising merry hours and temporal gain, he persuades and seduces man at first into what he calls venial faults, and labors to keep him in these until they have grown into a habit. Afterwards he advances by geometrical progression. Sin grows from sin, and one transgression follows another, the new being always the double of the old; and so the increase proceeds, until at last the base pleasure which has been bought, can be paid for only with that which is above all price, namely, the immortal soul; unless, indeed, God mercifully interpose in time, with His Holy Spirit opening the sinner's eyes, convincing him of the deception, and inducing him to revoke the bargain, and implore help and deliverance from his Savior, Jesus Christ. It is therefore best to keep one's self aloof, in every way, from Satan and his concerns, and to regard no sin as venial and small. How can it be that, when it is committed in opposition to the holy will of the Most High God?

My God! teach me to reckon every sin great, so long as I live; but oh, let me look upon the very greatest sins as little, when I die!

## 123. The Children's Cup

A sagacious father had purchased for his children a little cup, out of which they were to drink, and little plates, from which to eat their food, and made it a rule that when these were once emptied, they received no more. Gotthold saw and approved this strict domestic discipline, but at the same time said: Friend, how comes it to pass that what we find beneficial for our children, we are unwilling to approve when done by an all-wise God to ourselves? We fix and measure out for them a convenient portion of meat and drink, and yet we are seldom satisfied with that which the Most High, in His good pleasure, ordains for ourselves. Do we suppose that we men, in our folly, understand what is good for our children's health better than God what is good for our salvation?

My God! had I my will in temporal things, I would use them in the most senseless way, and, as children do with meat and drink, would bring upon my poor soul sorrow and distress by my excesses. Heavenly Father! allot to me a cup either large or small, and pour into it much or little, as Thou wilt; but give me always a few drops of Thy blessing and grace, and with these I shall be satisfied.

## 124. The Sheep

Gotthold one day saw a farmer carefully counting his sheep as they came from the field. Happening at the time to be in an anxious and sorrowful mood, he gave vent to his feelings, and said: Why art thou cast down, my soul? and why disquieted with anxious thoughts? Surely thou must be as dear to the Most High as his lambs to this farmer. Art thou not better than many sheep? Is not Christ Jesus thy Shepherd? Has not He risked His blood and life for thee? Hast thou no interest in His words: I give unto My sheep

eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand?[^aap]

This man is numbering his flock; and thinkest thou that God does not also count and care for His believing children and elect, especially as His beloved Son has averred that the very hairs of our head are all numbered?<sup>3</sup> During the day, I may perhaps have gone astray, and heedlessly followed my own devices; still, at the approach of evening, when the faithful Shepherd counts His lambs, He will mark my absence, and graciously seek and bring me back.

Lord Jesus! I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek Thy servant; for I do not forget Thy commandments.<sup>4</sup>

## 125. The Generous Tree

A Beautiful tree was so laden with fruit, that it bent its branches to the ground, and, as it were, offered it to men in handfuls. Gotthold beheld it with pleasure, praised God for the blessing, and, the apples being in season, approached to take one. The force, however, which he used, shook the slender bough, and the consequence was, that several dropped at his feet.

Fair tree, he exclaimed, how generous thou art! Thou givest me more than I desire; reminding me thereby of the incomprehensible and unmerited goodness of God, which presents its blessings as it were upon loaded branches; says to us, Behold me, behold me;<sup>5</sup> and does exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.<sup>6</sup> Hannah, the afflicted woman, prays for a child, and obtains six.<sup>7</sup> Solomon asks for wisdom to enable him rightly to govern his subjects, and obtains not wisdom only, but riches and honor, such as scarce any other monarch ever possessed.<sup>8</sup>

We often ask for daily bread; but as the ripe apples drop in numbers into my hand, so dost Thou, my God, exceed our asking when this is good for us, and conducive to our salvation. What has a child to do with unripe fruit? And just as little would it profit me to receive that which is hurtful to the

soul, even though I asked for it. And we, too, should resemble this tree; presenting the fruits of faith to all who ask them, extending our loaded branches, and distributing with a liberal hand to the needy. As this is seldom done, we have reason to fear that in the garden of God not a few of the trees are unfruitful, mere cumberers of the ground, and which have therefore nothing to expect but the axe and the fire.

My God! make me fruitful, and ever ready to minister to my neighbor, as all Thy creatures do to me.

## 126. The Mill

Passing a mill one day, Gotthold recollected the wise observation of a certain prince: Man's heart is like a millstone; pour in corn, and round it goes, bruising and grinding, and converting it into flour; whereas, give it no corn, and the stone indeed turns round, but only grinds itself away, and becomes ever thinner, and smaller, and narrower. Even so the heart of man requires to have always something to do; and happy he who continually occupies it with good and holy thoughts, otherwise it may soon consume and waste itself by useless anxieties, or wicked and carnal suggestions.

When the millstones are not nicely adjusted, grain may indeed be poured in, but comes away only half ground, or not ground at all. The same often happens with our heart, when our devotion is not sufficiently resolute. On such occasions, we read the finest texts without knowing what we have read, and pray without hearing our own prayers. The eye flits over the sacred page, the mouth pours forth the words, and clappers like a mill, but the heart meanwhile turns from one strange thought to another; and such reading, and such prayer, are more a useless form than a devotion acceptable to God.

My God! I too have often, in conversing with Thee, been like one asleep and unconscious of what he says. Mercifully forgive me for this, and asso-

ciate henceforth Thy Spirit with my heart, that my prayer may be as devout as Thy majesty and my own necessities require.

## 127. The Damaged Bell

A bell in the neighborhood had been rent, and when being rung, clearly evinced by its tone the damage it had sustained. Gotthold, happening to hear it, mused as follows:

In the same way, it is scarcely possible that the faults of those who occupy lofty stations in the world can remain concealed. The more highly they are exalted, the further off do men hear their good or defective tone. In persons of low degree, even great faults are little thought of; and the humbler they are, the more speedily and effectually will their evil report be swallowed up by the humbleness of their condition. Among the lofty, however, the smallest blemishes are reckoned great, and, by their exalted station, spread to a greater distance.

Keep me, my God, from casting a stumbling-block before any. I will rather be humble, unknown, and good, than great, renowned, and ungodly.

## 128. Ingratitude

A person was lamenting that, though he had done good to numbers of his fellow-men, he had been rewarded with gratitude by few, and with ingratitude by many; and he averred that, for this reason, he was resolved henceforward to limit and restrain his liberality.

Gotthold replied: Friend, did you ever see the horses taken to water? They rush into some beautiful stream or tranquil lake, and drink of it to

their heart's content; after which they turn their backs upon it, or stamp in it with their feet until the water is polluted. This is the price they pay for their refreshing draught. But what then does the noble river? It immediately floats away the mud, and continues after, as it was before, full, and free of access for the same or other thirsty creatures. And so must you also do. If there really be a fountain of genuine charity in your heart, it will constantly and spontaneously overflow, whether those who drink of it are thankful or not. He is a senseless husbandman who expects to reap the produce of his seed before the harvest. This life is the season for sowing and scattering; we shall reap hereafter.

My God! grant that my bounty may be a clear and transparent river, flowing from pure charity, and uncontaminated by self-love, ambition, or interest. Thanks are due, not to me, but Thee, from whom all I possess is derived. And what are the paltry gifts for which my neighbor forgets to thank me, compared with the immense blessings for which I have so often forgotten to be grateful to Thee!

## 129. The Light

Wishing to seal a letter, Gotthold called for a lighted candle. The maid obeyed his orders; but, proceeding too hastily, the flame, which had not yet gathered sufficient strength, went out.

Here, said Gotthold, we have that which may well remind us of the gentleness and moderation to be observed in our comportment towards weak and erring brethren. Had this candle, when first lighted, been carried slowly, and shaded by the hand from the air, it would not have been extinguished, but would soon have burned with vigor. In like manner, many a weak brother might be set right, if we only came to his help in the right way, and with kindly advice. It is not by violent strokes that you reduce the dislocated limb. Christ Himself does not quench the smoking flax, but blows upon it with the gentle breath of the blessed words that proceed out of His



mouth;<sup>9</sup> and this was the reason why disconsolate sinners flocked around, and pressed upon Him, to hear what He said.<sup>10</sup>

## 130. Second Meditation on the Light

Continuing, Gotthold said:

The candle, by burning and shining, consumes itself, but gives light to others, and ministers to their use. In the same way ought we to reckon ourselves happy when we are permitted to employ our bodily and mental powers in the service of God and our neighbor, although we thereby gradually waste them away, and become ripe, for death. It is better to consume our life in care and discomfort for the service of others, than in luxury and pleasure to our own destruction.

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1. Proverbs 6:6–8.↩
  2. Psalm 39:6.↩
  3. Matt. 10:30.↩
  4. Psalm 119:176.↩
  5. Isaiah 65:1.↩
  6. Ephes. 3:20.↩
  7. 1 Sam. 1:20; 2:21.↩
  8. 1 Kings 3:12, 13.↩
  9. Luke 4:22.↩
  10. Luke 5:1; 15:1.↩

# 131. Third Meditation on the Light

Often, in the evening, Gotthold added further, we see the midges swarming about the candle, and never desisting until they have singed their wings, and even burned their bodies. The same happens to all who, with presumptuous and inquisitive thoughts, flutter around that Light which no man can approach unto.<sup>1</sup> In place of enlightening, it dazzles or destroys them. Nor is any one so incapable of comprehending the divine mysteries as he who fancies that he has a special talent for the task, and ventures, with ingenious intellect, to pry into all things.

Lord Jesus! Thou light of the world, be also the light of my soul! What a candlestick is without the candle, that is my reason without Thy grace and Spirit. Grant that I may here, as a child of the light, walk in the light; and hereafter be also found meet for the inheritance of the saints in light!

# 132. The Trembling Poplar

There is a species of poplar whose leaves have long and slender stalks, and are therefore often rustled by a breeze too faint to stir the foliage of the other trees. Noticing the fact one day, when there was scarce a breath of air, Gotthold thought with himself:

This tree is the emblem of a man with a wounded and uneasy conscience, which takes alarm at the most trifling cause, and agitates him to such a pitch, that he knows not whither to fly. The wicked man trembleth all

his days, saith the Scripture:<sup>2</sup> a dreadful sound is in his ears; and though there be peace, he feareth that the destroyer shall come upon him, and that he shall not escape misfortune. The Jews tell us of Cain, when sojourning in the land of Nod, – which is the land of motion, – that wherever he trod, the earth quaked beneath his feet, as if unwilling to bear the fratricide. Be that as it may, it is at least certain, that he who has a troubled conscience can find rest nowhere. The threat pronounced by God upon the evil-doer is fulfilled in him:<sup>3</sup> Thou shalt find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and failing eyes, and sorrow of mind.

It is a sore calamity and distress when, from age, sickness, or accident, we are afflicted with a trembling of the head or limbs; but it is far worse when a troubled conscience makes the heart within us quake like an aspen leaf.

Merciful God! help me, by Thy grace, never to do what my conscience forbids. Sin may be pleasant to swallow, but bitter is the pain with which it afterwards wrings the bosom. Not all the world, with all its wealth and honor, pleasures and consolations, can soothe or tranquilize it. Rest for the soul flows from no other source than the wounds of Jesus.

## 133. The Mendicant

A story was told of a beggar who, during the day, limped about upon crutches, pretending to be lame and impotent, and begging for alms with a mournful voice; but who, in the evening, at his quarters, and in the midst of his comrades, cast his crutches away, took part in the carouse, and showed by dancing the perfect soundness of his limbs. Many expressed their surprise at this, and called the fellow impostor, thief, and vagabond. But Gotthold observed:

My friends, he is not the first, and just as little will he be the last, to practice falsehood for the sake of money. Do you suppose that he has not

many a match, even among those who go about arrayed in silk and satin? How many try to cheat, not merely men, but God! How many deceive themselves, as this beggar does his fellow-men! Only reflect what takes place in church. We demean ourselves devoutly during worship, penitently at confession, and decently and temperately at the season of communion. Our words then are: Ah, me! I am a poor sinner; heartily do I deplore my transgressions; I cast myself upon the Divine mercy; I will be glad to mend my ways. Oh, how grieved the beggar then is! and how afflicted he pretends to be! But only observe him when he has quitted the church, laid aside his assumed devotion and fictitious piety, is left to himself, and returns to his wanton associates. In a moment, sin, repentance, good resolutions, heaven and hell, are all forgotten. Devotion is drowned, conscience cast away, and the poor sinner no longer sorrowful, sick, and wretched, but bold, reckless, haughty, and ungovernable.

We wonder, and with good reason, that, under the Papacy, people believe that they can promote their salvation by purchasing a monk's hood and wearing it in the grave. We are not, however, aware that we ourselves have only chosen the hood of a hypocrite, in preference to that of a monk. This is the disguise which most Christians wear, and in which they also die; they seem to think that to become a new creature in Christ is a very poor affair.

Alas, Lord Jesus! of all deceptions in the world, none is so common as self-deception. Looking into the mirror of self-love, men fancy that, if they please themselves, they must also be pleasing to Thee; whereas the very opposite is the case. Oh, let Thy Holy Spirit guide me into all truth, and keep me from imposing upon myself!

## 134. Laughter

Passing a tavern one Sabbath-day, Gotthold heard the loud and boisterous laughter of a great company resounding from it, and said, with a sigh: Alas, beloved Savior! how little attention is paid to the word which Thou hast spoken: Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger! woe unto you

that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep!<sup>4</sup> We read that the heathen, in ancient times, figured Laughter as a god, erected a statue, and, with great rejoicings, celebrated an annual feast in his honor. The nominal Christians of our own day have, as it appears, been learning their customs; but, in place of one, have built many temples to the idols of Laughter and Joy, and meet in them, not annually, but rather weekly and daily, showing far greater diligence in their worship than in the service of the true God. Even the Sabbath has become a day for tippling and swinish excess; piety is changed into pomp, seriousness into sensuality. But, alas! laughter like this makes devils laugh, and is a premonition and prelude of everlasting weeping and wailing; just as the laugh of new-born infants is regarded by physicians and mothers as a sign of the sharp pains and bitter crying that are to ensue.

This reminds me of a strange and melancholy story of an incident which took place ten or twelve years ago in a celebrated commercial city. A well-dressed and handsome youth entered an inn, called for breakfast, then for beer and wine, and at last for gamesters and musicians. He spent the whole day in mirth and jollity of every conceivable sort; and, when evening came, paid the bill, and bade the musicians follow him, playing their very best. He then took the way to the navigable river which flows in the vicinity, – dancing, singing, and laughing as he went, – and walked into the water, to the astonishment of the musicians, who, fancying it was a diversion, looked on and continued to play. At last, calling for a right merry tune, and throwing them a dollar from the stream, he laughed aloud, cried Good-night, gentlemen, plunged into the deep, and was drowned. It was generally supposed that he was a clerk from some distant place, who had squandered the money of his principal, and did not dare to face the day of reckoning. Fear of punishment on earth plunged him into everlasting wailing. Such is the mirth, the pleasure, and the laughter of the world.

Holy and merciful God! grant me grace to rejoice as though I rejoiced not. Thou art the fountain of true, heavenly, and perpetual joy. Be Thou the joy of my heart, and then will I willingly forego the joys of the world. Better enter into heaven weeping and mourning, than go to hell with mirth and laughter.

## 135. The Disconsolate Man

A person in deep distress called one day on on Gotthold, told him that he had something to say, and expressed a wish to converse with him alone. Being shown into a side-chamber, he began to shed such a flood of tears as rendered vain any attempt to utter a word.

You wished to speak with me, said Gotthold, and now, though your lips are silent, I can easily understand, from the language of your eyes, that your heart is burdened with some great distress. Dear sir, do tell me what it is, and relieve your mind. Ah I said the stranger, sin, sin! thou poison of the soul! how dost thou gnaw and plague my poor heart!

To this Gotthold rejoined, with a smile: You had almost made me as disconsolate as yourself, and drawn tears from my eyes by those that flow from your own. But, so far as I can understand, this sorrow of yours is not worth sorrowing for; nay, your grief even makes me glad, and I take delight in your distress. Indeed, even the holy angels smile to see you weep, and the Lord Jesus Himself rejoices because you mourn. Had I witnessed your sin, I might then have wept; but, now that you are weeping tears of sorrow for it, you give me cause heartily to rejoice. This is that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of.<sup>5</sup> I wish from my inmost soul that I saw all the impenitent and secure in the state in which you are. There are many indeed who weep because they cannot have their will, not many because they have had it. I see plenty of mourners in the world, but few who mourn for themselves; and yet, miserable is that soul which has never once wept for its own undoing. Disconsolate hearts, however, are the proper vessels to be filled with the blood and consolations of the Lord Jesus. Weep, then, and let the fountain of your tears flow unrestrained. The heavenly Physician is already seeking a remedy for your sorrow.

## 136. Why God permits Sin

The stranger continued: Ah, me! why did God permit me to go astray, and commit sin?

In truth, replied Gotthold, you may be certain that it would have been much more pleasing to Him if you had not sinned; but, since the thing is done, be thankful that, in His mercy and forbearance, He did not punish you in the act, and, by a sudden death, hurry you into eternal perdition. Understand likewise, that, being infinitely powerful and good, He would not suffer evil to take place in the world at all, if His infinite power and goodness could not turn it into good. Meditation upon sin breeds godly sorrow, holy hatred of a sinful life, contempt of the world, and longing after heaven. The soul which is watered with such rain as your penitent tears, will flourish with the graces of humility and meekness, long-suffering, loving-kindness, and compassion for others. No one teaches more gently, or waits more patiently, or comforts more effectually, or forgives more heartily, than he who has himself needed gentleness, patience, comfort, and forgiveness. Who loves the Lord Jesus so much as he to whom many sins have been forgiven? Who has so strong a relish for the sweetness of grace as he who, under the painful smart of his misdeeds, has tasted the Divine displeasure? Ascribe your fall to yourself, and your own wickedness; but ascribe the season you have had for repentance, and the insight which you have obtained into the deformity of sin, and the hearty desire you cherish for the grace of God, solely to the Divine goodness. That is of so marvelous a kind, that it strengthens us even by our frailties, and raises us by our falls.

## 137. After-Pains

Experience testifies, that after a severe fall, or the fracture of an arm or leg, although the injury may have been successfully cured, yet the patient frequently feels pain in the injured part, especially at the approach of a storm. Some sensations of the kind led Gotthold to reflect upon them, and he was at a loss what to call them but a secret impulse of the love of God, intended to remind us that our gratitude is due to Him, as long as we live,

for graciously protecting us in the hour of danger, and so far mitigating the evil, as that it should not break our neck, or cripple us for life. But, just like the body, he proceeded to say, so has the soul its mishaps, its convalescence, and after-pains.

Alas, my God! what else is this life but a miry way, a sheet of slippery ice, and a dangerous ladder? How easily we may happen to fall and hurt our soul.<sup>6</sup> In such a case, no doubt. Thou tenderly pitiest us, and healest our infirmities. But, that we may not forget ourselves, and may learn to walk humbly and circumspectly, our conscience sometimes feels the smart of former falls. My God! when the painful remembrance of my past sins recurs, I will thank Thee, that Thou didst not suddenly cut me off in my transgressions, but in Thine unspeakable goodness didst spare my life. I will also thank Thee for not leaving me at ease under my hurt, but for adopting means to cure it thoroughly in this present life, that it may not terminate in everlasting death hereafter. The pains of conscience are caused by the wine of the law which Thou pourest in to cleanse the wound. But along with the wine Thou pourest in the oil of mercy to soothe and heal it. Be it smart, or be it solace, both, I am certain, will work together for my good.

## 138. The Blinded Bird

Gotthold was one day shown into an apartment in which a number of birds were kept for the entertainment of their owner. Among these was a nightingale, in a cage covered with green cloth, and a finch, blindfolded. As the owner said, and as experience testified, these two surpassed all the rest in the mirth and pleasantness of their notes. Gotthold observed:

Although I cannot approve of imprisoning these poor little creatures, and far less of depriving them of the use of their eyes and the light of the sun, it yet gives me pleasure to behold in them the true emblem of a devout suppliant, who speaks to his God with filial boldness, and thanks Him with joyful lips for all his blessings. To this end, the soul must be in solitude and at peace, and not only choose a secret and undisturbed retreat, but keep aloof



from its own worldly cares, thoughts, and wishes, and resign itself, with child-like confidence, to the Divine will.

How blessed the man who prays with his soul blindfolded, seeing nothing but the mercy and majesty of God! His prayers, and psalms, and sighs, are so pleasing, that God and all the holy angels listen to them with delight. At first, indeed, it may appear strange and difficult, when we are told to look upon no earthly object with confidence; on further trial and experience, however, we will discover that no one observes more acutely, or sings more sweetly, than he who, sequestered from the world, and blindfolding the eyes of his understanding, directs his heart, in peace and simplicity, to God.

My God! close my eyes, that I may see Thee; separate me from the world, that I may enjoy Thy company.

## 139. Gray Hairs

Meeting an old and worthy man, who lifted his hat to him, and thereby exposed his silvery locks, Gotthold thought with himself: How true it is, as the Scripture says, that the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness; and that the gray head is the beauty of old men!<sup>7</sup> God Himself, when He appeared in a human form, was pleased to wear gray hair,<sup>8</sup> and in His law has enjoined the young to rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man.<sup>9</sup> Even the heathen discovered, by the light of nature, that it is disgraceful not to treat the hoary head with respect. This silvery crown cannot be won without a world of care, trouble, and sorrow; and therefore every white hair upon it should admonish the young to show it due honor, thankfully acknowledge its toil, and supplicate of God long to spare and preserve the heads whose silvery locks conceal much wise counsel, large experience, and lofty gifts.

My God! my time is in Thy hands. Should it please Thee to lengthen my life, and complete, as Thou hast begun, the work of blanching my locks,

grant me grace to wear them as an unsullied crown of honor. Should this not be Thy pleasure, I shall be satisfied with knowing, as I do, that wisdom is gray hair unto men, and an unspotted life old age.

## 140. The Coin

Being present in a company where a new coin, bearing the likeness of a great potentate, was produced, Gotthold put the question: For what reason, think you, do monarchs cause their image to be stamped upon the coin of the realm?

To this one replied: No doubt, in order thus, too, to set up a memorial of themselves to posterity; there being nothing which men store and preserve with so much pains as money.

In my opinion, said another, a prince imprints his likeness upon the coin, as he does his seal upon a letter, in order to authenticate and give it currency as lawful and sterling.

Said a third. It may probably be also done to remind the subjects heartily to love and pray for the authorities under whose shield and protection they are enabled, in freedom and safety, to sell and buy, carry on trade and commerce, travel, or stay at home.

My explanation, subjoined Gotthold, would be, that a sovereign intends, by the exhibition of his image, to remind his subjects of his authority, power, and justice, that under this strong inducement, they may show the same integrity and uprightness in their dealings and transactions, as if the prince himself were agent, and ratified these by his presence. Let the occasion also remind us that our hearts ought to be a divine medal, stamped with the image of Christ, the Prince of heaven; and all that we say, or think, or do, should bear the impress of His love, gentleness, humility, kindness, temperance, charity, contentment, and truth.

Ah, Lord Jesus! do Thou Thyself stamp Thine image upon my heart, that it may be acknowledged as sterling in heaven. The dollars and ducats which

we so highly value, receive the royal or princely image only by being subjected to the hammer and the stamp. Even so, no one can be renewed into the image of God, unless he submit with cheerfulness and patience to the blessed cross.

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1. 1 Timothy 6:16.↵
2. Job 15:20.↵
3. Deut. 28:65.↵
4. Luke 6:25.↵
5. 2 Cor. 7:10.↵
6. Prov. 8:36 Luth. ver.↵
7. Prov. 16:31; 20:29.↵
8. Dan. 6:9: Rev. 1:14.↵
9. Lev. 19:32.↵

# 141. The Magnitude of the Heavenly Bodies

In a company of friends, the conversation happened to turn upon the magnitude of the sun, moon, and other stars, when one of them observed: It seems to me scarcely credible, that a body, apparently no bigger than a ball of fire or a glittering speck, should yet be many thousand miles in circumference. Gotthold heard the remark, and, in explanation of the matter, observed:

Did you, when abroad at night, ever happen to see a fire kindled by herdsmen, or hunters in the forest, or, for the benefit of sailors, on the sea-shore. Beheld from a distance, it seems so small, that you would declare it was only a spark. The nearer you approach it, however, the juster the notion you obtain of its magnitude. It is the same with the balls on the top of lofty spires; many a one, when he sees them from the ground, fancies they are no larger than his hat; and yet, you are aware, they are several ells [OLD UNIT OF MEASURE, ABOUT A YARD OR METER] in circumference. It is also the same, he proceeded to say, with the heavenly bodies; and when I now inform you that astronomers have indisputably proved that these are many millions of miles remote from the earth, you may perhaps be mightily astonished at a distance so vast; but, admitting the fact, you can have no difficulty in conceiving that, in spite of their prodigious size, the stars should yet appear to us so small.

In order, however, that we may reap some spiritual profit from this subject, let me take occasion, from your doubts, to remind you of the unbelief which we naturally inherit regarding divine and heavenly things. Earthly objects, which are before our eyes and lie at our feet, appear to us great and valuable, and worthy our utmost efforts; and so we strive laboriously after them, although they owe all their magnitude to our imagination; whereas,

on the contrary, the heavenly things which God holds forth to our view in His promises, and intimates to us by many a foretaste of His benignity – all vast and glorious although in reality they be – are reckoned small and inconsiderable, and sought after with little diligence or pains. The reason is, that we are on the earth, and are earthly minded. They however, who, on the wings of faith and devout contemplation, soar somewhat nearer to heaven, imagine the earth to be a little ball, and the great and haughty among mankind, with all their mighty enterprises, to be mere ants or worms that crawl upon it. The same persons, on the other hand, see heavenly things as great, glorious, and desirable – suitable to the greatness of Him who dwells in heaven. Learn, therefore, in future, to think little of what is thought great upon earth, and to aspire after that heaven in which alone are to be found great joy, great peace, great riches, great honor, great society, a great house, a great God, and a great and endless felicity.

My God! grant unto me what well beseems a soul which Thou lovest and chooseth – a proper sense of pride, that I may look upon this poor and passing shadow of a world as nothing, seeing that it cannot satisfy the wants of a spirit so noble in its nature, and so precious in Thine eyes. Grant also that I may pant after Thee and Thy heavenly kingdom, where all will be greater than my puny mind can now conceive.

## 142. The Contract

Two neighbors entered into a contract when Gotthold happened to be present. It was thought advisable that the terms should be drawn up in writing; but, as the party who gave the promise offered his right hand to the other, saying. There is my right hand – I will execute what I have undertaken like an honest man the other was instantly satisfied, and replied: Since you have given your word and hand, I trust you as an honest man.

Well done, my friends! exclaimed Gotthold; this is old German truth and integrity. Would that they were still universal! Christian sincerity should be the most binding of all obligations; but, being now so rare, recourse has

been had to writings and seals; and even these are not always found to be the best security. But another thought has just entered my mind: We men do occasionally trust a fellow-man in whom we discover some trace or hope of truthfulness, provided he pledge his hand and word. Why, then, do we not trust God, whom no one ever found false? We have His word in the Scripture and its promises; we have His hand in the dealings of His providence, and in the experiences of our whole life; we have His heart in the crucified Jesus; and, I might also add, His letter, written with the blood of His Son, and confirmed by the seal of His Holy Spirit. What, then, should hinder us from joyfully and fearlessly trusting Him with our whole heart and soul? We trust a father, a mother, a brother, because they are related to us by blood; we trust a lawyer for his wisdom, and commit to him our affairs; we trust a physician for his skill, and confide our health into his hand. Why, then, do we not trust God, who is all, knows all, and is both able and willing to do all that is necessary for our present good and final salvation?

## 143. Palpitation Of The Heart

The conversation, in a company, happening to turn upon the beating and motion of the heart in the human body, great admiration was expressed at the power and wisdom with which the Creator has so contrived these, as to keep the blood in circulation, and impregnate it with vital power, assimilating the heart, as one of the company observed, to the great machines which, through secret pipes, distribute water over a whole city. Gotthold observed:

Let this remind us of the expression which the Holy Spirit has twice used respecting David, namely, that his heart smote him<sup>1</sup>, upon one occasion, when, in the cave, he cut off the skirt of Saul's robe; and upon another,<sup>2</sup> after he had numbered the people. And let us supplicate as a grace from God, that, whenever we are tempted, by imprudence or infirmity, to enter on any doubtful or dangerous course, our heart may in the same way beat and palpitate, to warn us of our danger; or that, if we have already been misled, and are fallen into sin, it may give us no rest, but smite and compel

us, till, with true repentance, we fly to the cross of Christ, and find rest for it in Him.

Not without reason do I call such palpitation a grace of God; for, in fact, it is nothing else but Christ and His Spirit knocking at the door of our heart, either to dissuade us from sinning, or induce us to repent of having sinned. In the body, the stoppage of the heart's beating indicates the presence of death; and, even so, he who no longer feels palpitation in his conscience, is, even though living, spiritually dead.

## **144. Second Meditation on The Heart**

In the case of the criminal who has long stifled his conscience, the heart beats violently when he labors under apprehension or anxiety. We are told of an ingenious judge, who, as an easy and expeditious way of detecting a murderer among a number of persons who were suspected, ordered them all to stand round him in a circle, and uncover their bosoms. He then proceeded to lay his hand upon each in succession over the region of the heart, and discovered the perpetrator by the violence of the palpitation.

Here Gotthold paused; but a learned man, who was present, took up the word, and said that he had recently met with a very beautiful story, which was highly appropriate to the subject of conversation; and that, if it was the company's pleasure, he would briefly relate it. It happened in Switzerland, about one hundred and twenty years ago, that a worthy peasant was sentenced to the flames for adherence to the truth of the gospel. After many admirable proofs of constancy and fortitude during his confinement, he, so to speak, bequeathed to posterity a most remarkable one immediately before his death. When bound, and ready to be thrown into the fire, he craved permission to speak once more to the judge, who, according to the Swiss custom, was required to be also present at the execution. After repeatedly re-

fusing, the judge at last came forward, when the peasant addressed him thus:

You have this day condemned me to death. Now, I freely admit that I am a poor sinner, but positively deny that I am a heretic, because from my heart I believe and confess all that is contained in the Apostles' Creed (which he thereupon repeated from beginning to end). Now, then, sir, he proceeded to say, I have but one last request to make; which is, that you will approach and place your hand first upon my breast, and then upon your own, and afterwards frankly and truthfully declare, before this assembled multitude, which of the two, mine or yours, is beating most violently with fear and anxiety. For my part, I quit the world with alacrity and joy, to go and be with Christ, in whom I have always believed; what your feelings are at this moment is best known to yourself. The judge could make no answer, and commanded them instantly to light the pile. It was evident, however, from his looks, that he was more afraid than the martyr.

Gotthold offered the thanks of the company to the speaker for his beautiful story, with which, he said, he had not met in any of the martyrologies, and added: Let us, therefore, earnestly desire and continually pray, in the name of Christ, to God, graciously to give to us at our death an equally calm, happy, and fearless heart.

## 145. Books

A student of theology complained one day that he was too poor to procure a sufficient supply of books; and yet, according to his opinion, a study without books was like a druggist's shop, in which the unstopped vials and empty boxes can furnish no medicine for the cure of disease.

Gotthold replied: There is some truth in what you say; but, my good sir, do not imagine that a multitude of books is the only source from which it is possible to derive that erudition and mental culture which are acceptable in the sight of God. In fact, they often do more harm than good. It is possible



to dry up a vast stream by draining off its waters into little currents; and this is what happens to the mind which is prompted by curiosity or the hope of fame to read much, and toil through many books, but which gains only the boast of having read them; at the same time losing its humility and godliness. How foolish, too, is the man who sets up a number of costly volumes, like superfluous furniture, for mere ornament, and is far more careful to keep them from contracting a single spot of ink than to use them as the means of instructing his ignorance, and correcting his faults. Compared with fools like these, you ought to be considered fortunate. Better a man without books, than books without a man. Select for yourself one or two of superior excellence, and lay them not aside, until it is observable in both you and them that they have been well used. That copy of an old author, which a pious lady had read so often, and bedewed so plentifully with her tears, that the pages had grown thin and sallow, was worth all the libraries of all hypocrites and nominal Christians collected into one. Be less concerned, therefore, about the number of the books you read, and more about the good use you make of them. The best of books is the Bible; it is the treasury of all spiritual and divine sciences. To it, therefore, you must give the preference, because it will instruct you unto the kingdom of heaven.

## 146. The Savings-Box

Gotthold's sons had purchased a savings-box, to keep the little sums of money they occasionally received, and found that, however easy to drop the pieces in, it was much more difficult to bring them out. He thereupon observed: That is an emblem of the hearts and coffers of the vast majority of the men of these times. They are very greedy to take, but very backward to give, especially for the glory of God, and the relief of the poor. Oh, how long we must shake, and how many arts we must try, before we can extract even a penny from a hard and penurious man for the service of God or his neighbors! So long as he lives, he imagines that the business for which he came into the world is to collect and keep money; but when he has to leave the world, and when death breaks the savings-box to pieces, and he must re-

sign his hoard to others, he does it with reluctance and displeasure. I really believe that, were it not too absurd and useless, many a miser, in making his will, would do what a miser once actually did: appoint himself his own heir. How dreadful a folly to hoard up gold, and to lose heaven!

Jesus, save me from the infatuation of avarice! I too will lay up a treasure, but Thou shalt have the keeping of it. I will consign it to Thee through the hands of Thy needy members, and never will that be lost which is under Thy charge.

## 147. Blind Man's Bluff

The manner of playing this game is, to bind the eyes of one of the company, who then gropes about blindfold, and is all the while pushed and pulled by his comrades, until he can lay hold of one of them, who must thereupon take his place. Gotthold, coming upon a party of young people who were diverting themselves in this way, inquired of a bystander, What, think you, is the commonest game in the world? In my opinion, it is this. Blind-man's bluff is played everywhere, not merely by children and youths, but likewise, although unconsciously, by the old and wise.

I here recollect the pleasing fancy of an ingenious author, who figures the human soul as a shepherdess at play with Worldly Wisdom, Wealth, Fame, and Pleasure; and suffering these her playmates to bind her eyes in sport, ignorant that they are all the time in secret league with Satan, who slips from a wood, and catches the soul rushing blindfold into his arms. This beautiful allegory portrays the manner in which man, blinded by the world and his own fleshly desires, departs from God, and unconsciously falls into the snares of the devil.

Alas, Lord! how many thousand thousand souls there are who rush in this very way, with bandaged eyes, darkened senses, and hardened hearts, and amidst sport and laughter, into Satan's arms! With how many wise, learned, rich, and respectable people he is daily playing at blind-man's bluff,

although they neither think nor care about the matter! How many there are who suffer bad company to draw a cowl over their head; or their wives, best friends, and nearest relatives, to bind a handkerchief upon their eyes! And we love to have it so, because we call it sport, pleasure, diversion, love, intimacy, or a joke. In short, we reckon that to be a pastime which exposes the soul to the greatest danger, or even plunges it into perdition.

Ah, my God! keep me from ever playing such a game! Give me eyes opened and enlightened by Thy Holy Spirit, that I may walk in the light, eschew the deceitful sports of the devil and the world, and escape in safety from their snares. This, my Father! Thou hast hitherto been pleased to do. Though I have sometimes been persuaded to join the game, Thou hast torn the bandage from my eyes, and delivered my soul; and for this be thanks and praise ascribed unto Thee through all eternity.

## **148. Invisible Writing**

Someone happened to say that characters written upon paper with orange or onion juice, and afterwards dried, cannot at first be seen or read, but become legible the moment they are dipped in water. It is the same, said Gotthold, with men's actions. They scarcely take notice of their sins, or at least soon forget and are little concerned about them. Let God, however, immerse their conscience in the waves of trouble and the pains of death, and that which happened to the prophet happens to them. They behold a roll, written within and without, and therein lamentation, and mourning, and woe.<sup>3</sup> Wherefore, let us live good and Christian lives, that so, when it pleases our God, we may likewise die good and Christian deaths.

## **149. The Difficulty of Faith**

Who, said one of a company, would really refuse to trust the blessed God?

None of us, certainly, said Gotthold, so long as he has also faith in his own hand or purse; otherwise, to trust in God is a difficult, nay, an impossible task, for an earthly-minded, sinful, and timid heart. Such a heart cannot trust God without God's help, nor depend upon His grace without His grace's aid.

Faith has many enemies and gainsayers; and therefore it is a fight, and only keeps its ground by fighting. It has to comprehend the great God and His whole heaven in a little heart; and that is no easy task. A mother takes and carries about her child in her arms; soothes, fondles, kisses it; gives it meat and drink, and is very patient with it. But how long is it ere the child, on its part, learns to know the mother, returns her embraces and smiles, and shows her love and respect?

For myself, I can say with thankfulness, that now, through many trials, conflicts, struggles, temptations, sighs, and prayers, I have come so far, that I am beginning to believe that God is my gracious Father, and that I have an interest in the crucified Jesus, and in His merits, blood, and death. This is a lesson which I learn from day to day. Like a tender infant at the mother's breast, I lie at the Savior's wounds, and imbibe from them His blood and spirit, that I may grow in strength. Lord, I believe: help Thou my unbelief!

## 150. The Cipher

Observing a boy taking lessons in arithmetic, Gotthold said: There is here much to suggest good thoughts; for the present, however, I will select the cipher. I once heard of a sagacious man, who, being on his death-bed, was solicited to leave some memorial to his friends. Unable to articulate, he made signs to have pen and ink brought to him, and with these traced two great circles, or nothings, upon a sheet of paper. After his decease, there was much speculation what these could mean. The common conjecture was,

that he intended to signify that the body and the soul have their appointed circuits, and that, when these are finished, they return severally to their origin – the body to the earth, and the spirit unto God.<sup>4</sup> In my opinion, however, the two ciphers must have been intended to show the nullity of all terrestrial things, just as the wisest of monarchs could find nothing but vanity and vexation in the learning, pleasures, joys, honor, wealth, and glory of the world.<sup>5</sup> In fact, these are like the rockets which at festivals are discharged to amuse the crowd, but whose bright shining, and towering flame, end only in ashes.

All that the world contains may justly be likened to a note inscribed with a series of such ciphers, each of equal value with the other, but all of them worth nothing. Ye men of learning, what is all your erudition? A fragrant vapor, with which you entertain yourselves and others, but which speedily melts into the air. Ye great philosophers, what is your wisdom? A spider's web, woven with ingenuity and pains, but of no use save to catch moths. Ye men of rank, what is your dignity? An evening shadow, which, the longer it is, will the sooner disappear. Ye rich, what is your abundant wealth? A rose with many thorns; the flower soon withers, but the thorns remain. Voluptuaries, what is your pleasure? A sweet dream, which leaves you nothing when you awake but unsatisfied desire. It is a rule in Christian arithmetic, that, take nothing from nothing, and nothing remains. The world has nothing, gives nothing, and is nothing.

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1. 1 Sam. 24:5.↩
  2. 2 Sam. 24:10.↩
  3. Ezek. 2:10.↩
  4. Eccles. 12:7.↩
  5. Eccles. 2:3–11.↩

# 151. The Number Before The Cipher

Continuing his remarks, Gotthold said:

The children of God, however, are acquainted with an art by which they can make something out of nothing; for, if to several ciphers, otherwise of no value, I prefix a number, they then amount to several thousands. And, even so, the whole world, were I to possess it, would do me no good without the grace of God in Christ. If, however, I prefer Jesus to worldly things, – that is, if I receive them humbly, as a loan, from the hand of my Redeemer, and use them, in faith and love, to His glory, – they then acquire a high value, and may have the honor of being entered into the day-book and ledger of God.

Lord Jesus! out of Thee, all things are nothing; and in Thee, nothing is all. Riches are nothing, unless they minister to Thy poverty; the loftiest rank is nothing, if it seek not its honor in Thy ignominy and thorny crown; knowledge is nothing, if it knows not Thee; and pleasure nothing, if it is not tempered and sanctified by Thy cross. In short, the world is the world, and nothing but Jesus is Jesus, and all.

# 152. The Watch

Observing that one of his friends always carried his watch about with him, looked at it while traveling or transacting other important business, nay, not infrequently even took it out in company, to ascertain how time

was going, Gotthold thus mused with himself: If nothing be more precious than the fleeting time which the Most High has allotted to man for living and doing good, it is certainly a commendable practice to weigh it as if in scales, and portion it out with the utmost care and exactness, reflecting on the words of the apostle: As we have therefore opportunity (time), let us do good unto all men.<sup>1</sup> The true watch, however, which, at little cost, though with great benefit, I shall carry about with me, is the fear of my God; and of this I shall appoint my conscience inspector, that I may do nothing but what is well-pleasing to Him, and required by the brevity of life. A conscientious heart goes perpetually like a watch, and, if we attend to it, will tell us correctly what the hour is, and when it is time either for walking circumspectly, forsaking sin, or turning to God.

Thou faithful God! I thank Thee for having put the watch of conscience into the breast of man, and that, amidst all his enjoyments and employments, it strikes the hour so clearly that he cannot choose but hear it. Grant me grace piously to regulate my actions by it, and to lose no opportunity of doing good.

## 153. The Ring

A lady of quality once asked Gotthold what lessons in the practice of piety she should learn from the gold rings upon her fingers.

Let the marriage one, he replied, remind you that your soul is the bride of the Lord Jesus, espoused to Him in faith; and for this reason, be at all times true to Him, and strive to keep your soul, like a pure and chaste virgin, unspotted from the world and its pollutions. When worldly and sinful thoughts intrude into your mind, consider that they are the unchaste suggestions of Satan, who would fain estrange you from the Lord Jesus. If there be a stone set in the ring, reflect that, in the same way, Christ, the bright jasper and ruby, must be embraced by our faith; because, of itself, faith is of little worth, but with Christ, and through Him, is worth heaven itself.

## 154. Second Meditation on the Ring

Proceeding, Gotthold said: As the right hand, by wielding the pen or sword, and undergoing all kinds of toil, earns and procures the rings, and yet must often resign to the left, which does less of the work, the honor of wearing them; even so, remember that in the world they who merit honor most are frequently destitute of it; and look to yourself, whether the honor you enjoy has been really deserved; or whether, for example, men merely call you a Christian, and say you are virtuous, godly, benevolent, while perhaps you are conscious of never having yet earnestly attempted to be what these names imply that you are.

## 155. Wheat

Looking on one day while a farmer's wheat was being thrashed, Gotthold observed that the men not only stoutly beat it, but trode upon it with their feet; and, finally, by various expedients, separated the good grain from the chaff, dust, and other impurities. How comes it, he asked himself, that whatever is of a useful nature, and intended to be profitable to the world, must suffer much, and be subjected to every kind of ill-treatment; but that man, who himself does with other things as he lists, is unwilling to suffer, or permit God to deal as He lists with him?

Wheat, which is the noblest of all the products of the earth, is here thrashed, trode upon, swept about, tossed in the air, sifted, shaken and shoveled, and afterwards ground, re-sifted, and baked, and so arrives at last upon the tables of princes and kings. What, then, do I mean in being displeased with God, because He does not strew my path with rose-leaves, or translate me to heaven in an easy-chair? By what other process could the wheat be



cleaned? and how could I be sanctified or saved, were I to remain a stranger to the cross, and to affliction?

Deal with me, therefore, my God! as Thou wilt, and grant that what is Thy will, may also be mine. Thrash, toss, and sift me, that at last I may appear as white and pure bread upon Thy table. I will suffer all the more willingly, knowing, as I do, the words of Thy servant: Bread-corn is bruised, and yet not destroyed by thrashing. This also is done by the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.<sup>2</sup>

## 156. Loss of Memory

From the letter of a friend, Gotthold learned that a man of learning, with whom he was acquainted, had lost his memory, and thereby been incapacitated for all business of importance. Having often both heard and read of similar cases, he reflected upon them, and ere long convinced himself that the Most High has good reasons for permitting them to happen. They serve to teach men that it is in His power to deprive them of intellectual gifts, no less than of goods of fortune and advantages of person; and, consequently, that in every respect He is their Lord Superior. And this lesson should induce them to fear and love Him, and to use all things for the advancement of His glory, and in accordance with His will.

Moreover, he proceeded, I am not sure whether a retentive memory is absolutely preferable to a feeble one or not. No doubt the memory is a treasury in which a fund of sound and useful knowledge, experience, precepts, and instances, may be collected and preserved. By many a one, however, it is filled with things which are evil, and which, in place of promoting, prove a great hindrance to holiness and salvation. Happy the man who always remembers – 1st, *his sin*, that he may be kept from security, and pride, exercise constant repentance, and, with faith and humility, have recourse to God's mercy and the Savior's merits; 2nd, *the benefits* he has received from others – that he may show his gratitude; 3rd, *death* – that, like a Christian, he may prepare for its approach.

But happy, likewise, the man who totally forgets – 1st, *his own good deeds*, so as never to vaunt them before God or man, nor in heart or word upbraid those to whom they were done; 2nd, *the injuries and affronts he has received from others*, so as never to indulge anger or revenge; and 3rd, *lost property*, so as not vainly to distress and vex himself with cares.

Vouchsafe to me, my God! this land of memory, and this kind of forgetfulness.

## 157. The Death Of The Christian

The Christian, at his death, said Gotthold, should not be like the child who is forced by the rod to quit his play, but like one who is wearied of it, and willing to go to bed. Neither ought he to be like the mariner whose vessel is drifted, by the violence of the tempest, from the shore, tossed to and fro upon the ocean, and at last suffers wreck and destruction; but like one who is ready for the voyage, and, the moment the wind is favorable, cheerfully weighs anchor, and, full of hope and joy, launches forth into the deep.

The pious monk Staupitz, says: Die as Christ did, and then, beyond all doubt, your death will be good and blessed. But how, then, did Christ die? No, man. He Himself says, *taketh My life from Me, but I lay it down Myself*;<sup>3</sup> and St. Luke tells us that, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem; that is, He took the way to it with a confident and cheerful heart, and an intrepid look. Let us follow this great Forerunner; and, that we may do it with alacrity and confidence, and be at all times ready, let us so order our affairs, that, when we come to die, we may have nothing else to do. Thus should it be with me while I write, and thus with you while you read my words.

Lord Jesus, beloved Savior! do Thou Thyself make us ready.

## 158. The Altar

A Christian gentleman and his lady had presented to a church a new and costly altar, tastefully carved, and richly decorated with gold. Gotthold, having gone with a friend to inspect it, observed: It greatly delights me to see that the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is still felt, and still proclaimed before the world, by monuments like this. Our dearly-beloved Savior has, in the venerable sacrament of the Supper, instituted a memorial of His love for us. Why should not we, according to our means, and prompted by a believing and grateful heart, bequeath a monument of reciprocal affection to Him? I remember the words of a pious Jew, who says, “Were the entire globe to be suddenly converted into a lump of gold, and the hands of skillful artists forthwith to construct it into mansions and temples, it would still be unfit even for the footstool of our Lord.” And what is all the gold of the world, compared to the blood and love of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Know, however, that the very humblest among His holy and believing friends can erect a better and more costly altar than this. The Jew annexes to the words which we have quoted, “That, nevertheless, the holy soul is God’s favorite habitation;” and I will say, that the penitent and believing heart is the most beautiful of altars. Such an altar, however, every godly man can erect, without expense; and, consequently, even poverty has no excuse for refusing it.

Well then. Lord Jesus, make an altar of my heart, and let it be consecrated in faith and love wholly and exclusively to Thy service. Here will I offer to Thee my understanding, will, and memory – my tears, sighs, and prayers; and thus be at once both altar and priest.

## 159. The Bill of Exchange and Riches

A large sum had been remitted to Gotthold, for one of the members of his family, by a bill of exchange. When the money was being paid, he observed on the countenances of the bystanders the astonishment commonly felt, especially by the young, at the sight of so considerable a quantity of coin, and took occasion to say:

Learn in youth to withstand the fascination of money, and not to contemplate it with pleasure or appetite [CRAVING], as if it were some excellent and precious thing. It is, in fact, glittering earth, and nothing more. Unstable and fugitive, it flits from one to another, and is like the withered leaves which the wind drives to and fro, and collects here in one heap, there in another. I know not whether there exists such a thing as a coin stamped with a pair of pinions; but I wish this were the device which monarchs put upon their dollars and ducats, to show that riches make to themselves wings and fly away. Even, however, if wealth were more permanent, in what respect is man the better for it? The rich have little advantage over their poorer brethren in the chief things of this life. They are born like others; like them, they eat and drink – greater dainties, perhaps, but with less appetite, and no other effect than allaying hunger; like them, they wear raiment, which answers no other purpose than to cover and protect the body; like them, they are fretted with cares, and to a greater degree, because desire is wont to grow with possession; like them, too, they sicken, and like them they die. They must then part with all their money, and little good will it do them before the judgment-seat of Christ to have once possessed it. The rich give their children gold and silver pieces to play with; other children have only counters for the purpose, or manufacture money for themselves, of bits of paper and broken pottery. But the one child grows weary of the game, and goes to bed quite as soon as the other.

It is the same with us old men: Life is a game, and, whatever our playthings may be, we must part with them at last, and resign them into the hands of others. Let us, therefore, learn to look upon money with disdain, and to reflect, when we see it, Of what use will it be to me on a death-bed, or when arraigned at the tribunal of Christ? The more of it I have, the greater my responsibility. God is better than gold; rather let me be rich in Him, than rich in the world and its things.

If riches, however, be allotted to you, forget not to transfer some portion of them, by bills of exchange, to heaven, in order that, when you yourself follow, you may find a provision laid up there. Bestow your money on the needy members of Christ. They will give you, in return, their pious sighs and intercessions as a bill of exchange, which will be accepted in heaven, and, as merchants say, paid at sight. This is the best method of insuring property, and enjoying it even when life is past. But, alas! as an excellent doctor of our own day observes, God has little credit in the world. He says: Give, and it shall be given unto you. But no one will accept the security, alleging, What I have, I have; what I may get, who can tell? But if thou, world! wilt not trust God and His Word, I, for my part, will do it cheerfully; and time will show which of us fares the best.

## 160. The Pillow

Mention having been made of some one who had received a considerable inheritance, one of the company remarked that it would be a comfortable pillow for him; meaning that, with such affluent means, he would now have no occasion to vex his mind, or disturb his rest with cares. Said Gotthold:

'And so you fancy that the softest kind of pillow on which to rest the head is a bag of money. What if I could prove that they sleep least who have most money, and that, with great riches, there is often little rest. We all know the story of the Emperor Sigismund, who, having on one occasion received forty thousand ducats, and lain awake the whole of the following night, thinking how to spend them, made it his first, business in the morning to distribute them among the most deserving of his courtiers. Experience shows us that wealth is often accompanied by avarice, than which there is no greater foe to sleep. Granting, however, that a large fortune is a comfortable pillow to a man while he lives, what will it do for him when he comes to die?

Let me also remind you that there is also another kind of pillow, I mean a false trust in the divine grace and mercy, or in the sincerity of our faith, or in the pardon of our sins, or in a death-bed repentance, or in our right to eternal life, – of which many a wicked man, though continuing in presumptuous sins, ventures to boast. This pillow is prepared by Satan, who can transform himself not only into an angel of light, but also into a comforter. He suckles his children with false hope, sings to them a sweet song, and rocks them into the sleep of security. May God, in His mercy, preserve us from such a pillow as this!

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1. Galatians 6:10.↩
2. Isaiah 28:28, 29. Luth. ver.↩
3. John 10:18.↩

## **161. Second Meditation on the Pillow**

Believers and good men, continued Gotthold, have the best of all pillows; and that is the bosom of Jesus, in which they find the grace of God, rest for their souls, and peace to their consciences. They are like children who, after having walked all day in filial obedience, when evening comes, kiss their parents' hand, receive their blessing, go to bed with them in the same chamber, and calmly and securely fall asleep under their eye.

He who, in faith, has reclined his head upon the breast and heart of Jesus, resigned himself wholly to God, and learned to trust in His fatherly goodness and care, and to keep a conscience pure and void of offence, cannot but sleep quietly; for, though his body wake, his soul reposes upon this pillow, and is undisturbed.

## **162. Third Meditation on the Pillow**

Gotthold further said: A good man, when he happened to be overtaken by adversity, and felt his head and heart harassed with anxieties, used to take the Bible, read and searched in it until he came to some comforting text suitable to his case; and then, with his head upon the book, pondered and inwardly digested the words until he fell asleep. On, awakening, he generally found that his cares were gone, resigned himself to the fatherly will of

God, and thus found comfort and rest for his soul. What think you of such a pillow as this?

Lord Jesus! Thou art the refuge of my soul, the pillow of my head, the comfort and portion of my heart. Wide as it is, the world is not large enough to be my place of rest. When Thou didst become man, and enter it as a babe. Thou wert content to lie in a manger.<sup>1</sup> Nor was it a hard bed, as we might fancy; for it was spread for Thee by Thy Father's will, and Thy own love to man. For me, let them spread the couch, in this world, how and where they please; in the sacred will of my God, and the love of Jesus Christ, I will tranquilly repose.

## 163. Beauty

Hearing a young lady highly praised for her beauty, Gotthold asked: What kind of beauty do you mean? – merely that of the body, or that also of the mind? I see well that you have been looking no further than the sign which nature displays outside the house, but have never asked for the host who dwells within. Beauty is an excellent gift of God, nor has the pen of the Holy Spirit forgotten to speak its praise; but it is virtuous and godly beauty alone which Scripture honors, expressly declaring, on the other hand, that a fair woman which is without discretion is as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout.<sup>2</sup> Many a pretty girl is like the flower called the imperial crown, which is admired, no doubt, for its showy appearance, but despised for its unpleasant odor. Were her mind as free from pride, selfishness, luxury, and levity, as her countenance from spots or wrinkles, and could she govern her inward inclinations as she does her external carriage, she would have none to match her. But who loves the caterpillar, and such insects, however showy their appearance, and bright and variegated the colors that adorn them, seeing they injure and defile the trees and plants on which they settle? What the better is an apple for its rosy skin, if the maggot have penetrated and devoured its heart? What care I for the beautiful brown of the nut, if it be worm-eaten, and fill the mouth with corruption? Even so, external



beauty of person deserves no praise, unless matched with the inward beauty of virtue and holiness. It is, therefore, far better to acquire beauty than to be born with it. The best kind is that which does not wither at the touch of fever, like a flower, but lasts and endures on a bed of sickness, in old age, and even at death.

My God! my beauty exists only in the sunshine of Thy grace. Without light, nothing is beautiful; and, unless irradiated by Thy goodness, every object is ugly and hideous. Lord Jesus! Thou fairest of the sons of men! shed on my poor soul the beams of Thy love; that is all the beauty I desire.

## **164. The Conception Of A Portrait**

Visiting a painter, who was both a skillful artist and a pious Christian, Gotthold said: A painter requires, by long and repeatedly viewing the countenance he has to paint, to impress it, in the first instance, on his heart, in order afterwards, as far as possible, to produce it with colors upon the canvas. And, in the same way, it is upon the heart that the image of Jesus Christ must first be formed, and then afterwards transferred into a holy life, and an affectionate and godly walk. Once impressed upon the heart, it will soon show itself in the thoughts, words, actions, and gestures. And, in this work, never must we grow weary or dispirited. A picture is not painted at a stroke, but is brought by slow degrees, after many sittings, and with cautious touches, to perfection. To have the Savior formed in his heart, and copied into his life, is a task which will last the Christian all his days; and, oh me! how many interruptions will he meet, and how often will what has cost him much painful labor be obliterated! We must not, however, be discouraged, remembering that our very errors are lessons, and that perfection is the offspring of imperfection.

Lord Jesus! deign to accept our poor efforts and good-will; and do Thou Thyself impress Thine image upon our hearts, that it may also be outwardly

recognized in our good conversation.

## 165. The Only Child

A married couple, of rank and fortune, had an only son, and, as usually happens in such cases, loved and admired him to excess. He was the delight of their eyes and the comfort of their hearts., They would not permit the cold wind to blow, nor an unfriendly face to look upon him, and in all things gave him his will. Gotthold saw this, and remarked:

Beware how you provoke God to jealousy, and, by the intemperance of your affection, vitally injure your son! Do you fancy that the Most High has given you an idol to make you forget Himself? It would be strange conduct for a bride, having received a picture from her bridegroom, were she to become so enamored of the gift as to lose all thought of the giver; and yet this is what you do. God has given you your child, that the sight of him, from time to time, might remind you of His goodness, and induce you to praise Him with filial reverence. You, however, have set your hearts so wholly upon your son, that I know not whether you have any leisure to think of your Heavenly Father. This is like the fondness of apes, which caress and kiss their offspring to death. It is like the ivy or hop twining around the young and fruitful tree, till at last they strangle it. Let it be your study to rear and possess not a son merely, but likewise a godly son. Indulging a child is like exposing a cask to the sun or hot air: it shrinks, and if it do not fall to pieces, at least becomes incapable of holding liquid. In the same way, parental affection, when carried to excess, and unrestrained by reason and piety, is the ruin of children, and renders them unfit for all sound doctrine and virtue.

After pausing for a while, Gotthold continued, and said: This only son of yours reminds me that man has but one soul.<sup>3</sup> Oh! how desirable that it were as much the object of his love and attention, as your son is of yours! In truth, however, many act as recklessly as if they had ten souls in reserve, not reflecting that by losing the one, they lose all, and that all forever.

Besides, my God! I have also to consider that my soul is not my own, but Thine. Thou hast purchased it with the blood of Thy Son, and ought I to steal from Thee what has cost Thee so great a price? And yet, my Father, I am quite unfit for the custody of so precious a jewel. Too surely would I neglect and lose it. Thou Thyself must best know how to keep what has cost Thee so dear.

## 166. The Will

Gotthold had to do with a will in which his family were concerned, and which caused him all kinds of trouble and inconvenience. Conversing on the subject with an influential friend, he said:

It is much to be deplored that that equity for which the widow prayed is now no longer to be found, and that, as the Scriptures express it, judgment is turned to wormwood, and righteousness cast to the ground.<sup>4</sup> Gentlemen of the law appear to me, for the most part, to be like persons wandering in a forest, who have been so perplexed amongst the bushes and brakes, that they can no longer find their way out.

What sort of grapes they gather from the thorns, and figs from the thistles, it is easy to conceive.

There is, however, another Testament, about which I shall concern myself more; I mean that which the Savior wrote shortly before His decease, and in which He nominated believers His heirs. He had never either cared or sought for temporal things, and became at last so poor as not to have even a coat; and therefore He could not bequeath to them wealth. All He possessed was His cross. His thorny crown. His blood, His Holy Spirit, His sweet consolations, and His loving heart. These, therefore, He has left to us; and I rejoice in the bequest. Satan would fain dispute the Will; but it is well attested, and I have already entered into possession of the property.

## 167. Another Will

In order not to appear ungrateful, proceeded Gotthold, I too will indite and leave behind me a testament. I recollect a story, told by one heathen of another, in the following terms: Eudamidas, a citizen of Corinth, died in poverty; but, having two wealthy friends, Arctaeus and Charixenus, he left behind him the following testament:

In virtue of this my last will, I bequeath to Arctaeus my aged mother, to be taken home to his house, and supported for the remainder of her life; to Charixenus I bequeath my daughter, to be portioned and honorably fitted out by him, to the best of his ability. In the event, however, of either of the two dying, my will is, that the survivor shall supply the place of the deceased. This testament occasioned much mirth and laughter. The two legatees, however, were pleased with the testimony it gave of the confidence reposed in them by their departed friend; and as, in the course of a few days, Charixenus departed this life, Arctaeus undertook the double trust, and affectionately executed it.

If heathens, then, thus trusted, and showed themselves so faithful to each other, even after their decease, why should not I cherish a far greater confidence in the most faithful of all friends, my beloved Master, Jesus? I hereby, therefore, nominate Him my sole heir, bequeathing and consigning to Him, first, my soul, and next, my children, sisters, blood relations, and acquaintances, that He may adopt, protect, keep, and provide for them, by His mighty power unto salvation. The whole residue of the estate which I leave behind me in the world, shall be entrusted to His holy counsel and will, that He may do and deal with it as He lists, to the advancement of His glory, and the salvation of those I leave behind.

## 168. The Satiated Child

A child, after a full meal, had asked a slice of bread, and, sitting down, broke it into crumbs. Here, said Gotthold, see the consequences of superfluity, and what harm it does our corrupt nature to have more than it needs. This child, if hungry, would eat the wholesome bread with relish, and not willingly lose a crumb. Now, however, that he is satisfied, he plays with it, and wastes it. And we older children do the same. Hard times are best for teaching us economy and the prudent and grateful use of the gifts of God. Superfluity has always an attendant, whose name is prodigality; and never are more sins committed than when God is most generous to the world, and pours out His blessings like an overflowing flood. On the other hand, never do men look so often or so earnestly to heaven, as when the bread-basket is lifted above their reach, and dearth teaches them how precious is the Divine blessing.

Merciful God! I cannot say how it would be best to treat the world. For when Thou givest little, it murmurs and complains: and when Thou givest much, vaunts and plays the fool. my Father! exercise forbearance with its folly. For my own part, I will desire neither poverty nor riches, neither want nor abundance. In either condition, I have no confidence in myself. One thing, however, I know I wish, – give me, my Father! what is agreeable to Thy will.

## 169. Washing the Hands

One morning, as Gotthold was pouring water into a basin, he recollected the words of Scripture: I will wash mine hands in innocency<sup>5</sup> – a text which shows how diligently the Royal Prophet had endeavored to lead a blameless life, and walk habitually in the fear of God. Upon this he mused, and said: Henceforth, my God, every time I pour out water to wash with, I will call to mind that it is my duty to cleanse my hands from wicked actions, my mouth from wicked words, and my heart from wicked lusts and desires, that so I may be enabled to lift up holy hands unto Thee, and with unspotted lips and heart worship Thee, to the best of my ability. What will it profit me to strive

after outward purity, if my heart is filthy and abominable in Thy sight? Can the food nourish me which I have earned with polluted hands, or seized with violence and injustice, or eaten with insensibility and ingratitude? Ah, no, my God! far from me be food like this. My first care shall be to maintain a blameless walk; my next, when I have thoughtlessly defiled myself, to cleanse and wash away the stain, and remove mine iniquity from Thine eyes. Purge me, my God, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.<sup>6</sup>

## 170. Dross and Chaff

Fine gold, Gotthold proceeded, is not all equally pure and sterling, but more or less coated with dross, from which it must be purified by the fire. The finest wheat has a mixture of chaff, which, when fanned, it leaves behind. We endure the bad for the sake of the good in other things; why should we not act upon the same principle with our fellow-men? In persons who are virtuous and worthy, all is not worth and virtue; among the bad, we must reckon him to be the best who has the fewest faults.

My God! in Thy presence I have nothing to say, but that of all sinners, I am the chief. In the sight of men, however, it is enough if they can discover some one good point, for whose sake to be indulgent to my faults, as I am to theirs. As for those who fancy that they have no faults with which to soil their neighbor's fingers, and are all kernel, I leave Thee to be their judge, who art the Judge of all the earth.

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1. Luke 2:7.↩
  2. Proverbs 11:22.↩
  3. Psalm 22:20.↩
  4. Amos 5:7. Luth. vers.↩

5. Psalm 26:6.↩

6. Psalm 51:7.↩

# 171. The Enemy

A man was often complaining of the annoyance of an enemy, plainly showing that his heart was filled with hatred, and that, were opportunity to offer, he would not neglect to retaliate the hostility. This person Gotthold took aside and thus admonished:

You are always talking of your enemy, but be assured that he to whom you give the name can do you no harm, so long as you trust in God, and follow after that which is good. Be on your guard against yourself. Open enemies are far less dangerous than secret ones. The carnal man is really hostile to himself, when he indulges hatred, and meditates revenge against those of whose hostility he complains, inasmuch as he thereby makes an enemy of God, who hates all implacable and malevolent dispositions. With consideration, your supposed enemy may become the means of doing you so much good, that you will have reason to esteem him as your friend, and thank God on his account. An enemy is often like a medicine, which at first sickens and disorders the stomach, but afterwards removes the malady, and restores the health. An enemy teaches us to walk circumspectly; we must always be afraid of his sharp and hostile observation, and know that he will mark our halting, and publish it abroad to our shame and injury. An enemy impels us to prayer, and teaches us to place a higher value upon the friendship of God. An enemy exercises us in patience, confirms our faith, tests our charity, implants meekness, crushes pride, weans us from the world, and sweetens to us the prospects of heaven. Unless the fire and hammer do their part, the shapeless lump of gold can never become the goblet which graces a monarch's table; and just as little, without tribulation, can carnal men be converted into pious Christians. Look less, then, at the hammer than at the hand which wields it for your good.

My God! how shall I thank Thee, for having made even the wrath and bitterness, the slander and envy, of my enemies subservient to my best interests! They thought it for evil against me, but Thou hast turned their mal-



ice into the means of my edification. The world's enmity has made Thee and me the best of friends.

## **172. The Division**

Gotthold, hearing that several relatives were soon to meet, for the purpose of dividing a considerable inheritance, took occasion to say to them: Take heed that you do not divide hearts as well as property. The eye of a man often looks askance, when others attempt to share with him that of which he would fain appropriate the whole. A philosopher not improperly calls self-love a dissolvent, because it often disunites the hearts of the nearest relatives, and converts their love into hatred. In Paris, not many years ago, two gentlemen, at the division of a property of which they had been left joint heirs, proceeded from words to blows, when one of them killed the other with a pestle, and afterwards cut his own throat. In this way, Satan came in for a share. I myself was once present at the implementing of a will, when the minds of the relations became exasperated to such a pitch, that they broke to pieces the most costly vessels, and tore into shreds beautiful tapestries and hangings, neither wishing to give anything to the other. Nor did they ever afterwards in their lives meet or exchange words.

Cursed wealth! of which the devil makes an apple of discord. O unhallowed inheritance! which breaks the bond of Christian love, and forfeits the inheritance in heaven.

## **173. Second Meditation on the Division**

Beloved Savior, Gotthold proceeded, most unjustly did the world divide with Thee. It gave Thee only what Thou couldst not like – poverty, contempt, disgrace, the cross, the thorny crown, the scourge; and yet Thou didst not demur, fully satisfied with Thy Father’s love and holy will. And still it does the same. Small is the share of the good things that perish which falls to the believer’s lot. Generally it is little greater than Thine. But with this he is content, anticipating another division which will take place at death, and in which body and soul, wealth, honor, and all else will be divided, and nothing left to man but what he shall have treasured in his inmost soul. Happy he who shall then be able to say, the Lord is my portion and mine inheritance. For myself, I shall easily arrange shares with the world. It will give to me my crucified and insulted Savior, with His poverty and thorny crown, and I will let it keep the rest. We shall then be quits.

## 174. God and the World

Continuing, Gotthold said: Alas, ye children of men! why do you so fondly love the world? Why forsake the fountains of living waters, and hew out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water?<sup>1</sup> Why spend money for that which is not bread, and labor for that which satisfieth not?<sup>2</sup> Why forsake the God of all consolation, and set your heart upon the world, which is like the apple of Sodom, beautiful to look upon, but inwardly full of ashes; or not less like decayed timber, which, no doubt, glistens in the dark, as if it were some precious thing, or replete with fire, but disappoints him who stoops to pick it up, or hopes that it will warm his hands?

Jesus, my Lord! Thou hast the words of eternal life;<sup>3</sup> Thou hast strong and lasting consolation; Thou hast a loving heart, lips to comfort, and hands to help. With Thee there is both counsel and might. I have often found the world false, but never Thee. Thou art an unfading flower of strength and refreshment, and with Thee is the fountain of life that never runs dry. Let who will then forsake Thee: for my part I have no wish, and know as little

where, to better my condition. Be this, then, my resolution forever: Jesus, I will not forsake Thee.

## 175. The Wasp

One day a wasp had entered Gotthold's study, and for a time fluttered and buzzed before the window. At last he rose, caught it, and cut it into three parts. He then observed, with astonishment, that these three parts – the head, the breast and wings, the stomach and sting – although wholly separate from each other, had all, nevertheless, life in them. The head, when touched with a straw, still retained the power of catching it with its teeth, and suspending itself from it; the breast with the wings fluttered continually round and round, without being able to rise; the stomach, when touched, was instantly ready with the sting. This reminded him that he had read of St. Augustine's having once witnessed a similar phenomenon, and of his being unable to understand how the several parts into which an insect was cut, could still crawl about like the whole of it. Gotthold was equally at a loss to explain how the soul, so to speak, could be dissected like the body. But he soon said to himself: This may at least help me to comprehend how it is possible for the damned to suffer everlasting death, and yet never cease to live. We cannot doubt that when delivered into the hands of devils, they will be treated with the utmost cruelty, and, as I suppose, sorely mutilated, not to terminate their existence, but only to augment their pain, as every limb apart will suffer as much as the whole body when entire. They will thus be always dying, and yet will never die, but live in everlasting death.

As this wasp's head, even after death, if one may so say, attempts to bite, and the tail to sting, so the damned will forever retain their hatred against God and man, and so their everlasting malice will justly entail upon them everlasting anguish. Ah me! eternity! eternity! This is the worst of all the terrors of hell. That which has an end, however dreadful otherwise, admits of hope and consolation; but where shall an end be found to an endless eter-

nity! How blind, then, we are to forget hell as we do, especially as the best means to escape, is to meditate frequently upon it!

## 176. The Clock

Having taken a clock to pieces for the purpose of cleaning it, all manner of thoughts entered Gotthold's mind while afterwards engaged in again putting it together. He noticed as no inconsiderable, although an almost unnoticed blessing, that God has given to men an invention so ingenious and useful, enabling them as it does correctly to divide their time, and employ it in profitable labors, and especially reminding them, by every hour that strikes, of the vain and fleeting nature of life, and the rapid approach of death. At last, it seemed to him to present a beautiful emblem of Christianity. A clock, he said, when in good order, is always going, and one wheel propelling another; and even so must true Christianity be in continual exercise, and every act of godliness make way for the next. As a clock, however, needs to be constantly inspected, and frequently set and cleaned, so God, in His faithfulness and long-suffering, has continual work to do, amending, purifying, and regulating our Christianity. Moreover, as a clock does not go without a proportional weight, so the practice of piety likewise comes to a stop unless the Most High append the cross to our heart. In doing this, however, He takes care to burden no one above his ability.

Thou faithful God! let my Christianity be always under Thy gracious inspection. Unless Thou set, purify, and regulate it, it will never go well. Append to it as much of the cross as Thou mayest judge right, or it may require. Thou art merciful, and wilt not impose a greater burden than I can bear.

## 177. Sweet Wine

Gotthold had a bottle of sweet wine, and his child expressing, as children do, a wish to taste it, he poured a little into his cup, gave it him to drink, and inquired: How do you like it? To this the child replied: Sweet. He then asked, How sweet is it? and received again the same answer, Sweet, sweet; at which he smiled, and observed: And so all that you can say is, that it is sweet.

Ah, my God! he proceeded, sweet also is Thy grace, and delectable the drops of Thy goodness! This I feel and taste in spirit and faith; but were I asked how sweet and delectable they are, I should be quite as unable as this child to say more than that Thy grace is sweet. Its sweetness, in fact, is better experienced than expressed. I feel in my heart, and taste something in my soul which penetrates the bones and marrow, and is of all delights the most delightful, and of all sweetnesses the sweetest. So sweet is it that it kills all bitterness, and that I can neither conceive nor describe it. And yet, my God! they are but a few drops of Thy love and grace, which thus baffle my understanding and my tongue. How then will it be in heaven, when Thou shalt give me to drink of them in mighty floods! infinite God! Thy sweetness and felicity are infinite like Thyself! When will it be my lot to behold Thy face, and taste the full measure of Thy sweetness! Wert Thou to convert all seas and rivers, all lakes, ponds, and fountains, into wormwood and gall, and pour the whole upon my head, a drop or two of Thy love and goodness would be enough to sweeten and render it delightful. Vouchsafe to me in this present life as much of Thy sweetness as shall seem right to Thee, and be profitable to me. In the life to come, I shall be content to gather, beneath the table of the elect, the crumbs of Thy grace, and the drops of Thy goodness, and through all eternity never ask for more.

## **178. The Grubs In The Bee-hive**

When inspecting a row of bee-hives, Gotthold discovered under one of them a number of ash-colored, red-headed grubs, scattered upon the ground, which the bees had killed and carried out. On asking an old bee-cultivator

the explanation of this, he was told that the busy bees occasionally lighted upon a noxious plant, sucked from it an unwholesome juice, which they brought to the hive, and from which these grubs were produced. Gotthold mused, and said: If that be the case, it furnishes an excellent emblem of ill-gotten gain. Many a man, like a bee, labors hard to earn his livelihood. The desire of increasing his fortune, however, induces him to light indiscriminately and thoughtlessly upon every flower; – by which I mean, that he adopts all expedients, just and unjust, to enrich himself; shuts his eyes to the good of his neighbor; and so adds to his hoard many a penny burdened with the curses and sighs, the blood and tears, of the poor. Ere long, however, such unhallowed gain breeds worms and maggots, and these gnaw and devour his conscience and good name, his fortune and family. The Word of God tells us this when it says, In the revenues of the wicked is trouble.<sup>4</sup>

Keep me, Thou righteous God, from ever seeking my own advantage to the detriment of others; that so, instead of possessing a treasure and provision, I may not carry about a gnawing worm in my conscience and estate. What would it profit me were I to gain the whole world, and lose my own soul?<sup>5</sup>

## **179. The Bier [a coffin along with its stand]**

Seeing a hearse standing at a door, Gotthold concluded that there was a corpse in the house, and that it was about to be interred. Reminded thereby of his own mortality, he said to himself: Perhaps this is the very bier which will one day bear thee to thy grave; and, whether or not, at least the wood is already grown from which thine shall be made. Wherefore, man! be prepared to die, and so live that, when mourners are bearing thy body to the grave, angels may be bearing thy soul to heaven. Continuing his reflections, Alas! said he, were such a bier to be stationed at the door of every house which contains the dead, where could boards be found to make enough of

them? For, alas! many a man is dead while he liveth; yea, all are dead who live in impenitence and presumptuous sins. God is the soul of our soul, and the life of our life; and Christ must dwell in our heart by faith, and be the heart of our heart, to enable us to say, with St. Paul, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.<sup>6</sup> Just as the heart is the workshop of the soul, from which it distributes natural heat and vital energy into all the veins and members; even so must the Lord Jesus generate in us spiritual life, and diffuse His Spirit into all our powers, senses, desires, thoughts, and motions. Where this is not done, there is no life. The ungodly man is a living corpse; the worm of sinful desire consumes his conscience; he is an abomination in the eyes of the Savior, and offensive to God and the holy angels. As ravens rejoice over carrion, so infernal spirits exult over the soul that is dead in sin; and where is the house in which such a soul may not be found?

Jesus, my Lord, unless Thou deign to live within me, it were better for me to die at once. Be Thou my life, or I care not to live a moment longer.

## 180. The Ropemaker

Seeing a ropemaker at his work, Gotthold looked on for a while in silence, and then said: Holy Scripture compares sins to cords, and with great propriety; for, as a rope is twined from many threads, so is sin very rarely single; but one grows out of another, and often the new is committed to cover or excuse the old. Wicked suggestions are the first threads, the cherishing of these with satisfaction the second, the sinful purpose the third; the execution of it then twists the cord, and perseverance in it binds the sinner to his ruin. For instance,, it sometimes happens that a man will secretly purloin something from his neighbor: this is one sin. Suspected, and questioned upon the subject, he denies the fact; this is a second. Expostulated with, he curses and swears; this is a third. Offended by the expostulation, he conceives an implacable hatred against his accuser, and slanders him in every possible way; this is a fourth and fifth. And, lastly, he keeps the stolen property, and prefers losing his soul to the infamy consequent upon restoring it.

Ah, me! what a strong cord of the devil have we here! and how few there are who can disentangle themselves from it! And as this ropemaker is always moving backwards, while he has his work in front, and lengthens out the cord as he goes, even so do most men persevere in their sins, and look as little to the consequences as they can see what is behind them.

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1. Jer. 2:13.↩
2. Isaiah 55:2.↩
3. John 6:67, 68.↩
4. Prov. 15:6.↩
5. Matt. 16:26.↩
6. Gal. 2:20.↩



## 181. The Vine

A friend complained to Gotthold of the weakness of his faith, and the distress this gave him. Gotthold pointed to a vine which had twined and fastened itself around a pole, and was hanging loaded with beautiful clusters, and said: Frail is that plant; but what harm is done to it by its frailty, especially as the Creator has been pleased to make it what it is? As little will it prejudice your faith, that it is weak, provided only it be sincere and unfeigned. Faith is the work of God, and He bestows it in such measure as He wills and judges right. Let the measure of it which He has given you, be deemed sufficient by you. Take for pole and prop the Cross of the Savior and the Word of God. Twine around these with all the power which God vouchsafes. A heart sensible of its weakness, and prostrating itself continually with humble sighs at the feet of the Divine mercy, is more acceptable than that which presumes upon the strength of its faith, and falls into security and pride. Can you suppose that the sinful woman who lay and wept at the Lord's feet, was less approved than the swelling and haughty Pharisee?<sup>1</sup>

## 182. The Best Dish

Being one of the company at a banquet, Gotthold proposed, for their diversion, the question, What is the best dish which a host can present to his guests? To this one replied: The familiar and improving conversation of good friends, appealing to the words of the wise monarch: Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.<sup>2</sup>

Another said: The best dish seems to me to be the courtesy and tidiness of the lady of the house; for, if she change her face, and darken her counte-

nance like sackcloth, or give any ground for the suspicion that the hands which dressed it were not clean, there is little pleasure or relish even in the costliest fare.

Said a third: The best dish is that which is first offered to a hungry man; for the reason why the voluptuary can find, among the many which are served, scarcely one to please him, is, that he eats sooner and more than necessity requires, and never uses hunger as a sauce to his food.

In the opinion of a fourth, the best dish was an open and generous heart on the part of the host; for, if the guest have the slightest ground to suppose that he has not been willingly or disinterestedly invited, or that he is grudgingly entertained, or that his words are marked and treasured up, he will have little relish for any of the dishes.

Gotthold then took up the word, and added: There is certainly reason in your answers, but I too will say what I think. The best dish is that which has been earned by fair means and with a good conscience, is enjoyed with gratitude and reverence towards God, and of which the poor beggar at the gate receives his share: For how can any dish be called good which is seasoned with the tears and sighs of oppressed Christians, and with the Divine malediction? No dish is good which does not do the eater good; and what good can any dish do which is eaten with such a sauce? Wherever gratitude to God and charity to poor neighbors are forgotten, the last cup in life's banquet is usually quaffed amid the flames of hell, as the rich voluptuary experienced.<sup>3</sup>

Lord Jesus! give me only a crust of bread, but let it be bedropped with Thy blessing, moistened from Thy wounds, and sweetened by Thy love: I will gladly share it with a needy brother, and desire no other or better fare.

## 183. Servants

Having inquired of the servants, who had been for some time in his family, whether they were disposed to remain, Gotthold received for answer,

that they had no cause of complaint; knew not what better they could do; and, if he were equally satisfied with them, had no wish to change their place. Gotthold, on his part, having no ground for dissatisfaction, retained them in his employment. The occasion, however, led him to reflect as follows:

Between master and servant, mistress and maid, there is no difference but that which God has made, for a short interval in this present world. The stars, though not all of one magnitude or brightness, have all places in one common heaven: in like manner, we occupy different degrees of honor, rank, and wealth, but have the same firmament of grace over our heads – namely, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.<sup>4</sup>

What right, then, have I to despise or injure my domestics, although they must call me master, and wait my command and pleasure? And what if they shall attain to higher degrees of faith, charity, meekness, patience, and contentment, than I do? We read of a hermit who had a high notion of his own sanctity. It was revealed to him, however, that in this respect he was greatly inferior to a poor girl, who was waiting-maid at an inn. With this person he sought an interview, and, having inquired in what her pious deeds and acceptable services consisted, was answered, that she was not conscious of any particular sanctity, but tried diligently and faithfully to execute the work of the house, and the other tasks assigned to her; and especially made it a rule, every time she lifted a bundle of fagots to carry it into the kitchen, to meditate with cordial affection upon Him who, from love to her and all mankind, had once borne the tree of the cross. In the same way, many a precious stone lies neglected upon the ground, but nevertheless continues to be a precious stone. The pearl oyster is rough and unsightly on the outside, but beautiful and bright within, and precious for what it contains. Even so pious servants are often humble and despised in the world's eyes, but great in God's.

## 184. The Fragrant Death's Head

One of Gotthold's friends had got a little scentbox, made in the shape of a death's-head, with a screw at the skull for opening and taking it asunder. It then showed various cells, filled with fragrant balm. Being asked why he had made the box in this particular shape, he replied: In order to have something continually reminding me of my mortality. On this Gotthold rejoined:

You have done well, if such was indeed your object, and not rather to possess a curiosity for people to gaze and wonder at. The thought of the mortality to which, like all your race, you are subjected, may be infinitely more profitable to you than all kinds of balm. If seized with the delirium of pride, reflect that death will one day reduce you to dust and ashes, and whither your pomp like a flower. If overcome by angry passion, take to heart that death stands behind you with his axe, and only waits the signal from God to reduce you in an instant to the impotency of a dead gnat. If your heart ache, and your head be distracted with cares, recollect that all your trouble and anxiety will one day come to a blessed end. Oh! how precious, how fragrant, how superlatively sweet a balm it is, upon every emergency to remember our mortality!

Help me, my God I continually to live as if I did not live, that so at last I may die as if I were not dying.

## 185. The Thoughts

Observing one of his family absorbed in deep thought, Gotthold inquired: Why so pensive? Of what are you thinking? The answer was: Of nothing. To which he rejoined:

It is impossible for a man not to be thinking of something. We ought, however, to accustom ourselves to have no thoughts but such as we should not be afraid to divulge, were we unexpectedly interrogated about them; inasmuch as, whatever they are, though hidden from men, they cannot be concealed from God. Such as the thoughts are, the soul is. The cask, long after it has been emptied, retains the scent of the liquor with which it was

formerly filled; and in the same way do the thoughts leave behind them the trace of their nature and quality in the heart. And as wine is never put into a foul or fetid cask, so never does God pour his grace into the heart which is voluntarily defiled with evil thoughts. The thoughts are the soul's pinions, with which it wrings its way either to heaven or to hell. With these it may either, like Noah's dove, light upon an olive-tree, and pluck from it a twig; or, like the raven, settle upon a carcass, and defile itself. They are the possessions and wealth of the soul, as Job calls them.<sup>5</sup> This treasure of the heart, however, derives all its value from the stamp it bears; for thoughts not impressed with the seal of God, the love of Jesus, or the marks of His Holy Spirit, must be reckoned false money, which will not pass. See, then, well to it, that you cherish and harbor no evil thoughts in your heart. I do not say that they must never enter, for this would be to require too much, and more than, since the fall, is possible. The heart is an inn, and, rightfully, no thoughts ought to be admitted into it but such as are on their way either from or to heaven; otherwise it becomes a licentious haunt, like that of which the Lord says: Jerusalem! how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?<sup>6</sup> The first stage to actual sin is, to think evil thoughts; the second, to love and cherish them. A foreign teacher says that they are the first-born children of original sin, and the parents of every other kind of it.

## 186. The Child Learning to Walk

When just beginning to walk, a child was exercising its feeble steps, with the help of chairs and benches, while the mother sat at some distance, and, with endearing words and a sight of the breast, enticed it to quit hold, and advance to her alone and unsupported. This at last it did, cautiously setting one foot before another, till it came within her reach, and then, in an ecstasy of delight, fell into her arms. Gotthold watched the scene with peculiar pleasure, and thought with himself: Most beautifully is the divine training of my soul here shadowed forth! What else is my Christianity but the timid tottering of this little one? What all my perfection but imperfection felt and deplored? What my strength but weakness? The Savior, however,

acts towards me a mother's part, – attracts me with the sweet words of His promises, uncovers the breasts of His grace and everlasting consolations, and opens and extends to me His arms.

Well, then. Lord Jesus! I will creep if I cannot walk; I will take hold of Thy word. When I stumble. Thou wilt support me; when I fall. Thou wilt hold out Thy Cross, and help me with it to rise again, until at length I reach the place where Thou art, and with all my weaknesses, anxieties, and wants, cast myself into Thy bosom.

## 187. The New Suit Of Clothes

A little boy had got a new suit of clothes, of which he was excessively proud. Gotthold saw him, and, with a smile, said to the family: Human nature is very fickle; it soon tires of old things, and is always eager for novelties. We relish what is new and strange much more than what is old and familiar. The prophet tells us, however, that the Lord's compassions are new every morning; which means, as I understand it, that it is every morning as fresh and new to our most gracious God to do us good, in body and soul, as if He had never done it before. He never wearies, never loses the relish for it, feels constantly fresh delight in manifesting His goodness towards us. Oh, that it were equally fresh and new to us to be thankful to Him! and that, every morning, the first sighs and words which escaped from our lips were directed to His glory and praise! To this the royal prophet exhorts, saying, Sing unto the Lord a new song; as if he meant, Never let the Lord's praise seem to you an old and tiresome work, but think it always as fresh and new as if you were engaging in it for the first time. Observe, too, how cautiously this child now comports himself in his new dress; whereas he cared not how he soiled the old. Even so, never let the robe of righteousness, with which Christ has clothed us, appear old in our eyes. Rather let us feel as if we put it on new and fresh every morning; and let us walk cautiously and circumspectly, that we may not stain it with presumptuous sins.

My God! Thou fountain of all goodness, the more we draw from Thy bounty, the larger and fresher is its stream. Thou art more willing to give than we are to receive. Oh! grant that my heart maybe a fountain, from which Thy praise and gloiy may never cease to flow!

## 188. The Water-drop

The spigot not being properly secured in a watercask, there was a constant dropping into a basin which stood upon the ground below. Gotthold saw it, and observed:

This seems a very trivial circumstance, and yet it may suggest to us what ought never to be forgotten as long as we live. The rich man, when tormented in hell, implored a single drop of water to cool his burning tongue, but implored it in vain.<sup>7</sup> Ah me! how small a refreshment it would have been to one weltering in the fiery flames, to receive into his mouth the small quantity of water which adheres to the tip of the finger after being dipped into a fountain; and yet it was refused, – intimating that in hell no comfort or alleviation, however small, no intermission, however brief, can be hoped for. For this reason, when we hear the dropping of water, let us reflect on the fleetingness of life. As drop follows drop, until the cask is empty, so does hour follow hour, and one day or year another, until life is spent. What, then, would become of us, if all consolation terminated with our breath, and we were never, through all eternity, to taste the refreshment of a single drop of water?

My God! Thy loving-kindness and tender mercy are daily distilled from heaven in innumerable drops, and blessed is the man on whom they fall! But he who contemns or abuses the drops of grace in time, does not deserve even a drop of water through all eternity. On the other hand, he who in this life is satisfied to receive Thy grace in drops, shall hereafter be made to drink of it as a river.<sup>8</sup>

# 189. The Dark Night

One night, when there was no moon, Gotthold awoke, and finding the darkness so thick that he could not, as the saying goes, see his hand before his eyes, reflected thus: Wicked men, it is true, instigated by him who is its prince, often abuse darkness, and pervert it to the commission of acts of guilt and shame; but I see in it traces, which few suspect, of the hidden goodness and wisdom of God. Night, with its darkness, serves to cool and refresh the drooping plants, watering them with wholesome dew. It sharpens the sight by giving the eyes time to recover their optic power. It is of equal benefit to the mind.

By day, distracted with the multiplicity of the objects presented by the senses, the mind cannot duly weigh them all; but night, wrapping the head in her black mantle, secludes us from the external world, and gives it solitude and leisure for deep and calm reflection. Besides, what is darkness but a somber curtain which God in His kindness hangs about our beds, that our rest may be tranquil and undisturbed, whilst He who neither slumbers nor sleeps, keeps watch, like the mother over her child?

Grant, God! that when I awake in the night, I may think of Thee, and employ my mind in contemplating Thy inconceivable goodness. And do Thou also, amidst the darkness, cause Thy light to shine into my soul!

# 190. Angry Alms

Gotthold was one day occupied with important business, and deeply absorbed in thought, when his daughter unexpectedly entered the room, bringing a paper stating the case of a poor widow, with the causes of her penury, and soliciting an alms in her behalf. Losing his temper, he spoke harshly to



the girl, and, in an ill-humor, flung to her the sum she asked. He soon, however, recollected himself, and cried out:

Wretched man that I am! how fair the show which my Christianity often presents, to myself at least, and how boldly I venture to say, “Lord Jesus, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee;” and yet, now that my Savior has come and craved a mite for this poor widow, as a practical evidence of my affection, I take offence at Him for disturbing my poor thoughts, though for so short a time, and so good a cause. Go now, and plume thyself on thy faith and piety!

My God! Thou invitest me to come to Thee whenever my pleasure leads, or my necessities compel me; and, come when I may, never is my coming unseasonable or inopportune. Thou hast the whole world to govern, and yet I trouble Thee not though I break in at morning, noon, or night, and claim an alms from Thy mercy. How conceited I must be to reckon my concerns and cogitations of greater moment than the prayers and sighs of my suffering fellow-Christian! I now see that sin is rashness, and have good cause henceforth to give a more gracious reception to the Lord Jesus in His members, lest in my hour of need He turn His back upon me. God loveth a cheerful giver.<sup>9</sup> A benefaction to the poor should be like oil, which, when poured from one vessel into another, flows in silence, and with a soft and gentle fall.

An alms reluctantly bestowed, is like a rose spoiled and discolored with the fumes of sulphur, like sanded flour, or over-salted meat. He who exerciseth charity with a reluctant heart and angry words, resembles the cow which yields her milk, but overturns the pail with her foot.

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1. Luke 7:33.↩
  2. Proverbs 15:17.↩
  3. Luke 15 1:23.↩
  4. Eph. 4:5, 6.↩
  5. Job 17:11, Hebr.↩
  6. Jeremiah 4:14↩

7. Luke 16:23.↩
8. Psalm 86:8↩
9. 2 Corinthians 9:7↩

## 191. The Sore

Gotthold went on to say: To good men, sin and infirmity are festering sores, which give them pain, and from which they seek to be relieved. By the ungodly, on the contrary, sin and infirmity are prized as a jewel, and regarded as a distinction and an ornament.

My God! I beseech Thee, from my inmost heart, save me from the love of sin. May even the most venial faults give me pain. Daily admonish and correct me, whether by Thy Word and Spirit, or by a Sincere and Christian friend, or by anxiety and heaviness of heart, or by the cross, or by whatever other means you please. When I sin, may I be instantly sensible of it, and heartily and humbly seek and obtain from Thee pardon through Jesus Christ.

## 192. The Tangled Yarn

A woman had put a hank of yarn upon a reel, intending to wind it into a ball; but, as the thread would not run as she wished, she lost patience, and pulled it to and fro. This, however, only made the evil worse, for it multiplied the ends, until she no longer knew which to draw. Gotthold looked on in silence, but thought with himself:

I now see how it happens that the interference of third parties only complicates quarrels. The reason is, because they bring to them more of needless anger and zeal than of judicious moderation and skill. Many a matter might easily be settled if we only knew the right end by which to take hold of erratic<sup>1</sup> and willful minds. Worldly disputes are almost all like this yarn; whosoever ventures to meddle with them, except with a meek and sober

heart, will do no good. It is folly for any man to expect that all things shall or can be made square with his views. He acts a wiser part who tries to accommodate himself to seasons and circumstances, so far as he can with a safe conscience. Many a one complains of the tangled yarns and erratic characters with which he has to do, without being conscious that his own hat covers as much oddity, and that that gives other people no less occasion to complain of him.

My God! In my vocation I must daily expect to meet with tangled yarns. Give me a meek and prudent heart, that I may always find the right end to draw!

## 193. The Journey

Gotthold and some friends were in the act of starting on a journey, which was to occupy several days. All was ready, and the carriage at the door; but one of the party did not make his appearance, and, on being sent for, it was found that he had not packed his clothes, or made the other necessary preparations. He arrived at last, however, and they drove off; when Gotthold said:

We must not allow you to escape with impunity for having now delayed and detained us a whole hour; and your punishment shall be to listen to a good and salutary admonition, and bear it about constantly in your mind. Do you know, then, whom you have this day been imitating? – the children of the world. For these find, or make for themselves, so much to do with the world's vanities, that they never are in a state of readiness for departing out of it. They do not think of death, and so postpone to the last hour the collecting of their traveling gear; by which I mean, exercising repentance, faith, confession, prayer, and holy living. Never till then do they set their house in order, make their will, or attempt to disengage themselves from the world, which has often, however, taken so strong a hold of them, that they quit it only with reluctance and secret or open murmuring.

There are not many, says a wise Dutchman, who finish their lives before they die. Very few go, most are dragged, to the grave; and, instead of leaving the world, they are hunted out of it. Preparation for death seems to me of vast moment, and the neglecting or postponing of it good for neither living nor dying.

## 194. The Child At Play

A little boy was running about in an apartment, amusing himself as children are accustomed to do. His money was potsherds, his horse bits of wood, his horse a stick, and his child a doll. In the same apartment sat his father, at a table, occupied with important matters of business, which he noted and arranged for the future benefit of his young companion. The child frequently ran to him, asked many foolish questions, and begged one thing after another as necessary for his diversion. The father answered briefly, did not interrupt his work, but all the time kept a watchful eye over the child, to save him from any serious fall or injury. Gotthold was a spectator of the scene, and thought with himself:

How beautiful an adumbration of the fatherly care of God! We too, who are Old children, course about in the world, and often play at games which are much more foolish than those of our little ones; we collect and scatter, build and demolish, plant and pluck up, ride and drive, eat and drink, sing and play, and fancy that we are performing great exploits, well worthy of God's special attention. Meanwhile, however, the Omniscient is sitting by, and writing our days in His book. He orders and executes all that is to befall us, overruling it for our best interests in time and eternity; and yet His eye never ceases to watch over us, and the childish sports in which we are engaged, that we may meet with no deadly mischief.

My God! such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, and I cannot attain unto it; but I shall thank and praise Thee for it. my Father! withhold not from me Thy care and inspection, and, above all, at those times when, perhaps, like this little one, I am playing the fool.

## 195. The Morning Star

Having once, at break of day, beheld the morning star beaming in all its pomp and beauty, Gotthold thought with himself: Even a half-brutal heart could not but be struck with astonishment at beholding, for the first time, this bright and charming orb. Men often tell us, and sometimes falsely, of new and wondrous stars; but, to me, every time I behold it, this one appears to have acquired new and additional luster, and to be a peculiar marvel of the firmament. Nor can it fail to remind me of Thee, Lord Jesus; for dost Thou not call Thyself the bright and morning star?<sup>2</sup> It is not fiery red; it darts no sparkling flame around; but from its bright lamp pours so sweet and silvery a radiance, that we never weary of gazing upon it. And even so, my Savior, Thou art not passionate, merciless, or wrathful; but so gentle are the rays which Thy Divine and inconceivable love sheds upon us, that only he who does not or will not know, can help loving Thee. My soul never tires of contemplating Thee; and never turns to Thee one look or thought without experiencing Thy consolatory light. The rising of the morning star is the signal of the approach of day; and even so, when Thou, Lord Jesus, shinest into my heart, the dawn commences; the darkness of sin, ignorance, and sorrow, disappears; and the day of salvation gives me light and alacrity to walk before Thee in the paths of peace and holiness. How many complain that they have no star! – by which they mean, no good fortune. For my part, I have a most propitious one; and that art Thou, Lord Jesus, the bright and morning star, from whom I derive success and blessing on all, and in all things which in Thy name I attempt and undertake.

## 196. The Royal Entrance

It happened that a royal personage made his entrance into a town with great pomp and solemnity, and that a friend of Gotthold's was heard to say,

on the occasion, that he wished he were a prince, to enjoy such splendor. To this Gotthold answered:

You do not know what you wish. What is all this magnificence – the costly robes, the long guard in van and rear, the brilliant reception – but a specious disguise of the thousand hardships and cares which burden royalty? A worthy Christian prince may have many servants around him, and yet he must himself be the servant of all his subjects. Others have their several offices and duties, but he is responsible for all. He must have a watchful eye, and wake when others sleep; an acute ear, to hear in a moment the complaints of the oppressed; an eloquent mouth, to decide justly in cares of dispute; and an active hand, to punish the guilty and redress the innocent. His head must be a fountain of grave and weighty thoughts for the benefit of his country, and his heart a repository of anxieties of every kind. As the summit of a lofty mountain is most exposed to frost and tempests, and frequently covered deep with snow, which, when melted, irrigates and fertilizes the valleys around, even so a prince is indeed exalted above others, but on that very account is peculiarly liable to adversities, and cumbered with burdens, which redound to the advantage and safety of his realm. He is like a taper, which ministers with its light to others, but consumes itself. In wishing to be a prince, therefore, you wish for a prince's burden, and a prince's troubles, and, what is worst of all, for a prince's responsibility at the judgment-seat of Christ.

My God! for my part, I have no desire to be anything but what Thou hast made me. I grudge not the great and mighty what Thou givest to them. Nay, I know not that I would exchange my poverty for their riches, my solitude for their attendance, my low degree for their lofty rank. One thing, however, I do implore: Let me reign over the sin that dwells in my nature. Teach me to govern myself, and grant that I may one day be permitted humbly to enter the celestial city, welcomed by Thy holy angels, and wearing the crown of life.

## **197. The Circles On The Water**

Gotthold one day saw a boy standing upon the bank of a lake, and casting pebbles into its smooth and tranquil water. The effect was, as usual, that each, as it fell, produced a number of circles upon the surface, which were small at first, but became gradually wider and wider, until at last they disappeared from the view. Here, said he to himself, I have a pleasing emblem of my inquisitive mind, when it applies its reflection to the calm and deep ocean of divine truth. If I begin seriously to ponder the wondrous dealings and holy purposes of my God, I always see one divine benefit and proof of wisdom appearing behind another; or if I have searched, in some measure, one little circle of His ways, I perceive a thousand others, all widening as they recede, which at last fill me with awe, so that I stop and exclaim: Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.<sup>3</sup> Many, Lord, my God! are Thy wonderful works, which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts to us-ward. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

## 198. The Paper-mill

Visiting a paper-mill one day, Gotthold fell into the following train of thought: And so paper – that article so useful in human life, that repository of all the arts and sciences, that minister of all governments, that broker in all trade and commerce, that second memory of the human mind, that stable pillar of an immortal name takes its origin from vile rags! The rag-dealer trudges on foot, or drives his cart through the towns and villages, and his arrival is the signal for searching every corner, and gathering every old and useless shred. These he takes to the mill, and there they are picked, washed, mashed, shaped, and sized; in short, formed into a fabric beautiful enough to venture unabashed even into the presence of monarchs and princes. This reminds me of the resurrection of my mortal body. When deserted by the soul, I know not what better the body is than a worn and rejected rag. Accordingly, it is buried in the earth, and there gnawed by worms, and reduced to dust and ashes. If, however, man's art and device can produce so pure



and white a fabric as paper from filthy rags, what should hinder God by His mighty power to raise from the grave this vile body of mine, and refine and fashion it like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus Christ?<sup>4</sup>

Yes, God of might! Thou canst do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think.<sup>5</sup> For this reason I shall be willing and happy to die whenever it is Thy will, for I know, that instead of this body, which is needy and weak, vile and corruptible. Thou wilt give me another, which will be holy and perfect, vigorous and immortal, and wilt inscribe upon me, as upon a spotless sheet, divine wisdom, celestial brightness, and ineffable glory.

## 199. The Show-Dish

Inspecting a show-dish, which had been made to adorn the table at a coming banquet, Gotthold began: The world still cherishes her ancient tastes, and seeks enjoyment in vanity. Right well does she know that such a dish as this is a mere painted figure of wood, wax, and other materials; and, except for the pains and labor that have been spent upon it, worth little or nothing. And yet she fancies that she is specially honored and entertained when so worthless a thing is served up, and presented for a while to her view. We have another instance of this in paintings. I have seen the picture of a monk – of an old, wrinkled woman - of a beggar with tattered clothes – purchased for a hundred, nay, sometimes for more than a thousand dollars; and that by persons who would have scorned to waste a word upon a real monk, or so much as a look upon a real old woman, and would not have given an actual living beggar a penny to keep him alive. It thus appears that man is not only pleased to be deceived by a skillful hand, but even rewards the deceptive art with large sums of money. Surely every man walketh in a vain show.<sup>6</sup> What is their pleasure? Vanity. What their skill? Deception. What their honor? Folly.

My God! the beautiful firmament – the work of Thy fingers – shall be my show-dish, and the crucified Jesus my picture. In the former, I contemplate what Thy hand has prepared for our felicity; in the latter, the means by

which that felicity may be attained. Away with all that is vain; my only wish is for a blessed eternity.

## 200. The Christian Without A Cross

One day a lady of rank and great piety complained that, whereas in Scripture the cross is everywhere spoken of as useful and necessary for the children of God, yet she, for her part, must acknowledge, that hitherto the Lord had never deemed her worthy of one, and that this often raised within her melancholy thoughts and doubts whether she was one of His children or not. Gotthold said to her:

I confess that complaints like yours are not common, inasmuch as few Christians have any ground to lament a lack of the cross, while others, whose share of it is exceedingly small, nevertheless imagine that it is quite as large as they are able to bear; and in particular, those who are yet unaccustomed to it, are prone to fancy that their cross is too great and heavy for them. As for your case, however, it seems to me that you are actually bearing a cross without being conscious of it. You are vexed with gloomy thoughts because you have no cross. These gloomy thoughts, however, appear to me to be themselves a considerable cross, and also a very salutary one; for they not only evince, but nourish and augment your desire to resemble the Lord Jesus, and to take up your cross and follow Him.

Besides, the words of our Savior, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple,” relate not merely to the common hardships of human life, but are also and especially to be understood of the crucifixion of the old man, of his sinful lusts and desires, of self-denial, and the subjugation of the will. For the rest, we cannot and ought not to make crosses for ourselves, for this would end in hypocrisy. The Lord holds the cup of affliction in His own hand, and pours out of it when and as much as He will. That He has spared you hitherto, acknowledge with hum-

ble gratitude; He is the searcher of our hearts, and perhaps knew that, with the cross, your heart would not have felt towards Him as it has done without it. Recollect, however, that the drama of your life has not yet been played to the end, and that, for aught you know, your gracious God may still have some little cross in reserve for you, to be imposed in due time. The fiercest tempests often come in the evening of the finest summer days, and it is after the pure wine has been run off, that the lees are wont to follow. It ought to be another ground for gratitude to God, that He has given you time to prepare for all emergencies, and provide yourself with the armor necessary for your defense.

Finally, you live in the midst of Christians who are distressed with poverty and affliction, and groaning under crosses of all kinds; and, being a member of the body of the Lord Jesus, you will sympathize with them, your fellow-members, and take their sufferings and privations to heart. When you see any mourner, mourn with him and cheer him. To him who falls and is ready to sink beneath the weight of his cross, stretch out a friendly hand, and help him to rise. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, let your superfluities be the source from which the wants of pious Christian brethren are supplied. In this manner make yourself a partaker of the afflictions of others, and render to them the service which Simeon of Cyrene did to our Lord Jesus, by helping them to bear their cross. By enlisting into their company, you will be sure to pass as one of the genuine cross-bearers.

Lord Jesus! give me the mind of Thine apostle, who knew both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer want.<sup>7</sup> If Thou spare me, I will thank and fervently love Thee; and if Thou layest a cross upon me, I will still thank and love Thee no less. What know I what is good for me? But Thou knowest it, for Thou knowest all things.

## **201. Good Weather**

The weather had been warm and pleasant for several successive weeks, when some one exclaimed: Alas! what will come of these sultry days? What must be the consequences of so long a tract of sunshine, without a drop of rain? Gotthold replied:

What are you saying? Are you displeased that Heaven is kind, and that the fair sun has been, as it were, smiling upon us for so long a time? Yes, rejoined the other; but we must look before us; for, as the crops in the field and the fruit in the garden are in the meanwhile drying up and withering, these kind smiles of the heavens may probably cause bitter weeping upon earth.

Well, said Gotthold. if that be the case, let this weather remind us that temporal prosperity, which is usually compared to pleasant sunshine, frequently proves as little beneficial to us, as continued good weather to the crops. The dense and gloomy clouds which, with their discharges of thunder and lightning, shake and terrify the earth, and water it with drenching rain, are not pleasant; but they make the herb of the field rejoice, and man and beast along with it. Light comes out of the darkness, and blessing accompanies the rain. Similar are the effects of trouble and adversity upon the mind. They cause pain and sorrow, but are succeeded by spiritual and divine satisfaction and joy. On the contrary, a long continuance of temporal prosperity is wont to be the harbinger of some great misfortune, or even of eternal perdition, as we see in the case of the rich man in the gospel, and a thousand others. For there can be no doubt that you will search longer for one individual whom misfortune and adversity have driven to despair and ruin, than for a thousand whom success and prosperity have undone. Let us, therefore, at all times be suspicious of our good fortune; and just as, on sultry days like this, we are assiduous in watering our gardens, that the crops may not wither, so in the time of our prosperity let us be diligent in prayer, that God may not deny us His grace, nor take away from us His Holy Spirit, and that so by His governance we may walk prudently and humbly, and never pervert our temporal prosperity into the means of our eternal wretchedness.

## 202. Taking Pills

An invalid who had been ordered a couple of pills, took them very absurdly; for, in place of swallowing them at once, he rolled them about in his mouth, ground them to pieces, and so tasted their full bitterness. Gotthold was present, and thus mused:

The insults and calumnies of a slanderer and adversary are bitter pills, and all do not understand the art of swallowing without chewing them. To the Christian, however, they are wholesome in many ways. They remind him of his guilt; they try his meekness and patience; they show him what lie needs to guard against, and at last they redound to his honor and glory in the sight of Him for whose sake they were endured. In respect to the pills of slander, however, as well as the others, it is advisable not to roll them about continually in our minds, or judge of them according to the flesh, and the world's opinion. This will only increase their bitterness, spread the savor of it to the tongue, and fill the heart with proportional enmity. The true way is to *swallow, keep silence, and forget*. We must inwardly devour our grief, and say: I will be dumb and not open my mouth, because Thou didst it.<sup>8</sup>

The best antidotes to the bitterness of slander, are the sweet promises and consolations of Scripture, of which not the least is this: Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.<sup>9</sup>

Alas, my God! how hard it is to swallow the pills of obloquy!<sup>10</sup> to bless them that curse me, to do good to them that hate me, and to pray for them that despitefully use me! But, Lord, as Thou wilt have it so, give it as Thou wilt have it; for it is a matter in which, without Thy grace, I can do nothing.

## 203. The Bird Of Prey

A friend mentioned to Gotthold that he had seen a kite hovering in the air, and marking its quarry, and inquired of him, whether so rapacious a bird could furnish him with a theme for edifying thought. To this Gotthold replied:

Why not? Such a bird delights in the free air, and soars aloft, as if it would fain approach to heaven; all the while, however, it keeps its sharp eye continually directed to the earth, if haply it may there spy and seize a prey. And like it are hypocrites; they love to speak of heavenly and spiritual things; they go to church, and take the holy supper; they read, and pray, and sing; but, nevertheless, their heart retains its earthly inclination, and they seek that which is temporal more than that which is eternal.

## 204. Feeding The Hens

For amusement, a gentleman used to throw crumbs of bread, and occasionally a handful of barley, to his hens, from the parlor window. By this means they had not merely learned the custom of rushing to it the moment it opened, but likewise often stationed themselves beneath it, and signified by their cries that they had a boon to beg. Gotthold saw this, and observed:

Hens do to us as we do to God. He has often heard our cry, and given us the blessings we required for our spiritual and bodily nourishment, and has thereby, so to speak, habituated us to resort to Him on all occasions, and never to desist till we again receive His gifts; and this He does, although we are less profitable to Him than hens are to us. I have often wondered at the boldness shown by His children in their intercourse with Him, and not less at the loving-kindness and benignity of so great a potentate, in not only bidding us pray, but declaring that He is well pleased when, in our prayers, we are not merely bold, but, if I may so say, shameless.

## 205. The Conclusion

My God! I conclude this book, as I began it, in the name of Jesus. Its good thoughts, if any such it contain, are but sparks of Thy heavenly light; and whither ought the flame to point, or to whom aspire, but to Thee? All glory, honor, and praise, are justly Thine; and seeing, as I do, that of myself I am unequal to the task of praising Thee for the goodness which Thou hast shown me all my life, I have tried if I could not by these meditations stir up the hearts of others, and prevail upon them to unite with me in praising Thee as the glorious, loving, merciful, only wise, and righteous God. As the fire was mine which kindled their oblation, I wished to look upon it, although offered upon another's altar, as in some measure coming from me. My God! could I publish Thy praise with a thousand tongues and hearts, and prolong it through all eternity, it would still fall short of Thy deserts. Thou hast merited infinitely more at my hands. Let this book, then, praise Thee; or rather, let it be a testimony how willingly I would publish and extend Thy praise, and show forth Thy goodness to all the world, not only during my life, but even after my decease. If, however, there be anything in the book which has not been meditated on with the devotion, humility, and awe, nor imparted to others with the tender affection required by Thy majesty and my own duty, mercifully forgive it; and remember that even the holiest thoughts have been pondered in a sinful heart, the words uttered by a human tongue, and the pen wielded by an unclean hand. Yet still I am, and forever shall be. Thy servant.

### The End

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1. orig: whimsical↩
  2. Revelation 22:6.↩
  3. Romans 11:33.↩
  4. Phil. 3:21.↩

5. Eph. 3:20.↵
6. Psalm 39:6↵
7. Phil 4:12.↵
8. Psalm 39:2, 9↵
9. Matt. 5:11, 12.↵
10. Abusively detractive language or utterance; calumny. -American Heritage Dictionary↵



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# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

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## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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Him that they might have life. They reject Him, and therefore stand rejected. But those who come to Him, poor and needy and helpless, but trusting in His mercy, He will receive, to comfort and to save.”

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