

Anonymous

# A Descent amongst the Dissenters

Bethesda (Craik and Müller) Chapel,  
Great George Street

**bruederbewegung<sup>de</sup>**

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# A Descent amongst the Dissenters.

(BY ONE WITHOUT THE PALE.)

“Black spirits and white,  
Blue spirits and grey,  
Mingle.”

Bethesda (*Craik and Müller*) Chapel, GREAT GEORGE STREET. – Some time ago I was in Stuckey’s Bank, for the purpose of having my book made up, to see whether I could afford a set of new carpets, the urgent necessity for which my wife had been impressing upon me several previous mornings at breakfast, when, amid the crush and the elbowing of the numerous customers, I noticed a grave and somewhat tall and foreign-looking man take his stand close to me by the counter. He unrolled a package of bills, bank orders, &c., amounting to thirteen hundred pounds, as I could see by the paper which he pinned on to them, and passed over to some person or object’s credit, the name of which I could not hear.

When he had gone, the cashier inquired if I knew who he was; and, on my answering in the negative, told me it was George Müller, one of the two ministers of a sect certainly the most remarkable of any in this city. This sum which he paid in was only one of numerous deposits for the purposes of charity, the erection and maintenance of an Orphan Asylum, &c., and received from time to time, as he tells you himself, “in answer to prayer.”

This made me curious to know a little more about the religious body to which he belonged, so I bought the last published account of their proceedings, “A brief narrative of facts relative to the Orphan Houses and the other objects of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution, at home and abroad.” The first passage which met my eye on opening this tract was – “*Without any one having been personally applied to by me, the sum of £13,275 6s. 9¾d. has been given to me as the result of prayer to God since the commencement of this work,*” namely the establishment and maintenance of Orphan Houses, publication of tracts, bibles, &c.

The orphan institution (a charity of the most practical and positive kind) comprises four houses in Wilson-street, viz.: Nos. 6 and 4 for girls; that for infants, No. 1, and that for boys, No. 3. The admissions to these are made on a broad and liberal principle, there being no sectarian qualification necessary for the poor children, who must be bereaved of both their parents, and who are boarded, educated, and clothed from the funds so mysteriously and secretly supplied.

It is this mystery and secresy (sic), and the faith which is so firmly relied upon for success, that eminently constitute the peculiarity of this particular body. Though the annual outlay of their Orphan Houses is over £1,500, they have not I believe any certain income or stated subscription of a penny to depend upon. It is all left to chance, as the world would say, – to Providence, as the promoters would tell you. And certainly it is most remarkable, on reading the diary of Mr. Müller, to see how the supplies come in – to see how the orphan bag (the little exchequer), which daily travels between Wilson-street and his dwelling on Kingsdown, and back again, is (shall I say) almost miraculously replenished – the last penny in the locker being often remitted for the day’s wants, with a strong and cheerful reliance upon what the morrow might bring forth.

A perusal of this diary, as given in the “Narrative of facts,” would repay any one, if it were only for the entertainment which a singular succession of straits and deliverances

afford. Indeed, without reading it, you can form no idea of “the reckless faith” with which the founder and fosterer of those charities has abandoned himself to the motto of “sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,” and the surprising manner in which he has up to the present succeeded. In the last published statement of this diary, which he calls “an account of the way in which the Lord has been pleased to furnish me with means in answer to prayer only, without any human being having been applied to for help by me,” and which extends over two years, occupies sixty-four closely printed pages; I must, therefore, content myself with a few extracts as a specimen of the whole.

July 25, 1844. We have again to go on day by day waiting upon the Lord for the necessities of 140 persons (teachers and apprentices included.)

July 26, 1844. Only 6d. has come in to-day, by sale of Reports.

Aug. 2. *The day began with 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. in hand.* A little before ten o'clock in the morning the letter-bag was brought from the Orphan-Houses for money, in which I found a note, stating that the need of to-day was £1 17s., but I had only 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. to send. I wrote so to Brother R. B., intending to request him to send up again in the afternoon, for what the Lord might have sent in the mean time. When I was going to put the 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. into the purse in the bag, I found half-a-crown in the bag, which must have been slipped into it by some one in my house, before it was opened. This half-crown is a precious earnest that the Lord will help this day also. It was found by me just after I had risen from my knees, having been with some of the labourers in the work in prayer for means. Before I had yet finished the note to Brother R. B., master of the boys at the Boys' Orphan-House, a sovereign was given to me, so that I had £1 2s. 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. to send off. About two o'clock this afternoon I received: by sale of articles 10s. 6d., by sale of stockings 6s. 8d., and by the sale of ladies' bags 9s. 4d. Thus I could send off the 14s. 6d. which were still needed for to-day, and had 12s. left.

Aug. 6. Without *one single penny* in my hands the day began. The post brought nothing, nor had I yet received anything, when, ten minutes after ten this morning, the letter bag was brought from the Orphan-Houses, for the supplies of to-day. Now see the Lord's deliverance! In the bag I found a note from one of the labourers in the Orphan Houses, enclosing two sovereigns, which she sent for the Orphans, stating that it was part of a present which she had just received, unexpectedly, for herself.

Aug. 7. There came in, when there was NOT ONE PENNY in my hands: 4s. and 3s. 6d. as two donations; also 3s. I found in the boxes in my house, 10s. was given as the profit of the sale of ladies' bags, and 2s. 6d. as the produce of “A forfeit-box at a young ladies' school.” Likewise was given to me: two gold rings, two gold watch-keys, a pair of earrings, a gold brooch, two waist-buckles, a pair of bracelets, a watch-hook, and a broken brooch{.} Thus we have a little towards the need of to-morrow.

Aug. 9. It is just now striking eleven o'clock, and I have not yet one single penny towards the need of this day. The bag is brought from the Orphan-Houses for money, but I have nothing to send, and am therefore obliged to return the bag without anything. But my soul is waiting for help. The Lord has so repeatedly helped us again during the last weeks, and so He will surely do this day also. *Evening.* At half-past twelve this morning I received two notes from two sisters who labour in the Orphan-Houses, the one from the sister who, on the 6th, had sent the £2, being part of a present which she had received, and who now sent £1 more. She writes: – “The enclosed I *thought* of applying to another purpose; but *His thoughts* are not as ours. Please to use it as you think fit.” The other sister, likewise one of the labourers, sent 10s. This £1 10s. met our need for to-day.

Aug. 16. Our poverty is extremely great. The trial of faith as sharp or sharper than ever. It is ten o'clock, and there are no means yet for a dinner.

Aug. 20. This 3s. was all there was in hand for this day, which was needed at the boys' Orphan-House towards the dinner. In the other two houses (for the inmates of one were in a farm-house in the country, on account of the house being painted and coloured,) nothing was needed, but at the same time NOTHING WAS LEFT TOWARDS THE NEXT MEAL. Two o'clock came, and we had nothing yet.

[In these last cases always something came opportunely in the nick of time, either in money or trinkets or clothes, to supply the want.]

March 15. Yesterday afternoon was brought to me from Mr. J. N. half a sovereign. In the evening came in 19s. 4d{.} by sale of articles. But this was not enough for the need of to-day. *While the Orphan boy was waiting* for the money, I received the following letter from Bath. [The letter encloses a seasonable supply.]

March 17, Monday. The sixpence which I took out of the box in my room on Saturday evening was all there was in hand, when yesterday came in the following donations: – A. A., £1 2s. 4½d., anonymously put into the boxes at Bethesda, 6d., ditto with James i. 17, 2s. 6d.

But I need not go on multiplying my extracts from these

“Short but simple annals of the *poor*.”

Every second or third day you find “not a penny in hand,” or “not enough for the next meal,” followed invariably by some eleventh hour assistance “received in answer to prayer.”

Besides money, a large source of supply seems to consist in trinkets and odds and ends of other articles contributed. An inventory of those in the month of May, 1846 (which I take at random, there being one equally curious for each previous month), reads, from the multiplicity and variety of things therein enumerated, like a pawnbroker’s catalogue: –

5s. worth of postages. A card case. A gold chain, 2 small gold seals, a gold locket, a watch hook, a silver pencil case, and 2 purse rings. A small scent bottle in a silver case. A ring and 2 yards of print. 4 collars, 2 shirts, 2 night caps, a pair of boots, a pair of shoes, a pair of slippers, 5 waistcoats, 2 pairs of trousers, a jacket, a pair of gaiters, and a stock (all worn.) An homœopathic medicine chest. 2 netted bread basket cloths, and 4 babies’ pinafores. Some class lessons, some school books, 3 copies of Howard’s Lessons on the Old and New Testament, and 5 New Testaments. A box from Pershore, from a few christian friends, the contents not to be mentioned. A white net veil. 4 large plum cakes, one for each house. 12 small preserving jars, and 32 (?) lbs. of beef. A packet of Ervalenta for porridge. 7 brown loaves. A cask of treacle. 10 quarters of bread. A cask of treacle. 8 brown loaves. 4 pairs of socks, 1 silk handkerchief, 1 pair of gloves, 1 pair of slippers (all worn), and 8 little books. Some rhubarb.

From the audited accounts of the income and expenses of the institution, it appears the maintenance, &c., of the four Orphan Houses in Wilson-street, from July 14, 1844, to May 26, 1846 (the last report I can obtain), amounted to within a few pounds of £2,800; so that the largeness of the sum makes the singular manner in which it is provided for still the more remarkable, especially when you consider that the body commonly known as “the Craik and Mullerites,” are not a numerous or wealthy community.

Under the head of “Supplies for the School – Bible – Missionary and Tract Fund, sent in answer to prayer,” I find the following, with which my extracts from Mr. Muller’s “Narrative,” or “The Lord’s Dealings with him,” must conclude: –

I think it well to state here again, what has been noticed in former Reports, that though the brethren and sisters who labour in the Day-Schools have a certain regular remuneration when there are means in hand, yet that I am not their debtor when there are no means; so that they have to look to the Lord their Master for supplies, and not to me. At the same time, however, I also add, that if they should not have had their regular remuneration, which for the trial of their faith the Lord has sometimes allowed, the arrears have been paid to them when He has sent in the means. From Oct. 1, 1844, up to the time when this Report closes, God always so seasonably supplied me with means, that there never has been a time when the salary became due and I was not able to pay it.

May 6. About six weeks ago intimation was kindly given by a brother that he expected a certain considerable sum of money, and that, if he obtained it, a certain portion of it should be given to the Lord, so that £100 of it should be used for the work in my hands, and the other part for another object. However, day after day passed away, and the money did not come. I did not trust in this money, yet, as during all this time, with scarcely any exception, we were more or less needy, I thought again and again about this brother’s promise; though I did not, by the grace of God, trust in the brother who had made it, but in the Lord. Thus week after week passed away, and the money did not come{.} Now this morning it came to my mind, that such like promises ought to be valued, in a certain sense, as nothing, *i. e.*, that never for a moment the mind ought to be directed to them, but to the living God, and to the living God only. I saw that such promises ought not to be of the value of one farthing, so far as it regards thinking about them for help. I asked therefore the Lord this morning, when, as usual, I was praying with my wife about the work in my hands, that He would be pleased to take this whole matter about that promise completely out of my mind, and to help me, not to value it in the least, yea to help me to treat it as if not worth one farthing, but to keep my eye only

directed to Himself. I was enabled to do so. We had not yet finished praying when I received the following letter: –

“——, May 5, 1845.

“Beloved Brother, – Are your bankers still Messrs. Stuckey and Co. of Bristol, and are their bankers still Messrs. Robarts and Co. of London? Please to instruct me on this; and if the case should be so, please to regard this as a letter of advice that £70 are paid to Messrs. Robarts and Co., for Messrs. Stuckey and Co., for you. This sum apply as the Lord may give you wisdom. I shall not send to Robarts and Co. until I hear from you.

Ever affectionately yours,

“Jude 2.”

\* \* \* \*

Thus the Lord rewarded at once this determination to seek, not to look in the least to that promise from a Brother, but only to Himself. But this was not all. About two o'clock this afternoon I received from the Brother, who had, more than forty days ago, made the promise, £166 18s., as he this day received the money, on the strength of which he had made that promise. Of this sum, £100 are to be used for the work in my hands, and the remainder for another object. I took of these two sums, *i. e.* of the £70 and the £100, half for the Orphans and half for these objects. When this money came in, there was only very little in hand. The last Tracts had been given away, two or three days ago, but I had no money to order more: thus I was able to send off an order for 11,700. Bibles also needed to be ordered, but I had no money: I am now able to order some. It had been much on my heart to send {a} little help to some missionary brethren, as a token of affectionate interest, and this I am now able to do. The Lord be praised for His goodness in helping thus so seasonably!

Thus, it will be seen, that Mr. Muller (for by him the department of practical charity, Mr. Craik confining himself chiefly to preaching, is managed) has been living for a series of years in an atmosphere of benevolent difficulties – in a perpetual philanthropic money pressure – in which, however, he seems peculiarly to delight, with all the enthusiasm, though with a different motive from that of the young Emir in Tancred, who exclaims, “Oh my dear, beloved, cherished debts, what a state of miserable *ennui* must I exist in but for you, and the animation and mental activity in which you keep me,” or words to that effect (for I have not the book by me). As if to try his faith, Mr. Muller seems never to have “a large balance” on hand for the purpose of maintenance; for there are sometimes rents coming due, meals to be provided, and the boy from the Orphan House knocking with the “bag” at his door in Paul-street, when there is “not a penny” to send back in it. The knock of any one calling for money, when you have not got it, is never a pleasant thing, and it is teasing {sic} to the nerves to hear that “dun knock” repeated, while you are devising {sic} a decent excuse – but never, however plausible, half as satisfactory as the money – within. But Mr. Muller has not merely to think of himself in the matter, but of one hundred and forty mouths which have to be daily filled in Wilson-street – of one hundred and forty brisk appetites that will not cease, even though there be “nothing towards the next meal.” Oh! to see that little orphan runner daily pass the window, and trot up the steps of the house in Paul-street with his bag, and no supplies awaiting him, must require all the faith and all the zeal of even Mr. Muller. Alluding to these occasional and recurring straits of the good man, a bluff friend describing them said to me one day, “He (Mr. Muller), Sir, is always at his wits’ end for money, but never stumped up for twenty-four hours together – always pulling the devil by the tail for the good of poor orphans, and always getting into difficulties for the glory of getting out of them.”

Nor is this faith confined to Mr. Muller: all the servants, teachers, &c., of the Orphan Houses, schools, &c., largely participate in the feeling, and the confidence with which they open the receiving box, after a visitor has been through any of their institutions, with the “sure and certain hope” of receiving a £5, eminently deserves the success with which it is not unfrequently rewarded. I have heard that the principle is – not to go into debt for anything (unless the current quarter’s rent), to pay for everything the moment it is received, and if there is no money in the bag to buy nothing. Thus, if the milkman or baker

come to the door, and there are no funds, to have neither milk nor bread. The healthy and happy appearance and condition of the children, however, shows that this is a contingency which must very seldom occur.

It having been sometime since determined to raise one edifice for the orphan children, instead of having them dispersed over four houses as at present in Wilson-street, contributions for this object, without any public appeal whatever, began to pour in upon Mr. Muller, and I believe between nine and ten thousand pounds were received before the work was begun. How much of this the benevolent German received in silver thimbles, pencil-cases, turquoise brooches, and worn trousers, I cannot say; but there is some tradition of a singular dream in connection with the sale of the site on Ashley-down. The ground, I am told, belonged to Mr. Alfred Thomas, and Mr. Alfred Thomas will pardon me if I am wrong in my information; but so the story runs, that he one night had some revelations in his sleep that induced him to take fifty per cent. off the purchase money – a dream creditable to Mr. Thomas's benevolence, and very fortunate for the buyers.

Of course, there is a great deal which we cannot understand and do not pretend to unravel in the singular confessions of Mr. Muller's diary. People, too, may put down as ordinary and natural results what he wishes us to consider miraculous interventions; and think these constant prayers to heaven for necessary supplies answered by pencil-cases, thimbles, and trinkets, (always seeming to come in so "providentially") hardly consistent with our notions of the grandeur and dignity of the Godhead. Nevertheless, these Orphan Houses are a noble and an excellent charity, which do credit both to the faith of the preacher and the liberality of the people. We may have difference of opinion upon religious institutions, education, and other matters, but upon the simple and enlarged benevolence which provides for those helpless little things, whom death has cast upon the world, there can be no difference. Mr. Muller and his friends have in this done a great social good, for which society is indebted to them.

Like the Moravians, this religious body pursue the noiseless tenor of their way and worship in quiet and retirement. You never hear of them or their preachers in public or in politics; and there is a story told that so single-minded and secluded a life do Messrs. Craik and Muller themselves live in this respect that, notwithstanding all the bruit of the contested election of '41, neither of them knew of such a thing having been until days after it was decided. They might have seen the names of "Berkeley," and "Fripp," and "Miles," painted on the walls as they took their morning walks; but they passed by unconscious of their import. Of newspapers, periodicals, &c., they are innocent, and will probably never read what is now said of them. Should any one of their friends or congregation tell them of such a notice, I scarcely believe they will have the curiosity to ask to see it. And, let me tell you, a minister must be very far removed from the world, or absorbed in his work, who has conquered that very natural desire to see what others have said of him.

I passingly alluded to their "morning walks." Both Messrs. Craik and Muller are great ramblers in the fields. I am fond myself of a rural saunter before breakfast in the same neighbourhood, and I hardly ever go out without meeting one or the other. Carrying his camp-stool or sitting on it by some pleasant old tree, or picturesque green spot, Mr. Craik may be seen almost every summer morning in the fields about Cotham and Redland, always in a studious mood, as if premeditating some subject – it may be his sermon. Mr. Muller himself alludes to these rambles as a sort of regular matin duty, for he says, "This morning walked in another direction, and met a physician, who gave me £2 towards the Orphan Houses" – a deviation which, according to his usual course, he puts down as providential. You may depend upon it, however, that these quiet morning walks have

much to do with refreshing the heart, and giving a generous bounty and benevolence to its operations.

“One impulse from the vernal wood,  
May teach us more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all that sages can.”

The peripatetic philosophers of old, who wandered musingly into the fields were not less learned than those who studied in the “dust of the schools.”

In observing on their charities, I have left myself little room for reviewing the history of this people as a religious society. I hardly know amongst what class of dissenters to place them. They are, as a denomination, *sui generis*, though perhaps more allied to the Plymouth Brethren than to any other body. They practise adult baptism, when required.

ORIGIN. – When the late Rev. Mr. Wooldridge relinquished his charge at Newfoundland-street, for the purpose of going out as a Missionary to Jamaica, he was succeeded in the pastorship by Mr. Craik, who previously had some spiritual charge somewhere in Devonshire. With him was subsequently associated Mr. Muller, who came from Germany. After a while they took the chapel in Great George-street, built by the Rev. Thos. Conelly Cowan, who, as the reader is aware, seceded from the Church, having previously been curate of St. Thomas’s parish. Mr. Cowan having preached for some time in this chapel, afterwards gave it up, finding, good easy man, that his congregation were as much inclined to borrow from him as to listen to his sermons. For some time after their entrance upon the building in Great George-street, Messrs. Craik and Muller continued to hold Gideon chapel: the latter, however, they subsequently relinquished, and now confine their ministerial duties to the former and Salem Chapel, in St. Augustine’s-place.

Bethesda Chapel is in a pleasant and respectable situation, being built on the slope of the hill which good St. Brandon of old selected for his hermitage, and close to the pulpit where the Rev. J. Hopper is gracefully affected every Sunday for the good of two thousand intent and transported listeners.

At the porch of the Bethesda there is a request, that those who are not professing members should occupy the galleries. In compliance with this order I went up stairs, and found there only one young man, who abashed at his own awful solitude was in the act of retiring. This arrangement, I believe, was adopted as the Lord’s Supper is administered every Sunday, and it is desirable to keep the lower part of the building for communicants alone. There are no seat-rents or collections whatever made; but boxes are kept at the doors to receive voluntary contributions. A little orphan girl acted as door-keeper; and the array of quiet black and white straw bonnets and grey dresses within were a sober, but substantial, monument to Mr. Muller’s faith.

Mr. Craik, who is the principal preacher, is energetic and eloquent in the pulpit, and there is about his manner, as well as that of his colleague, the most perfect sincerity and kindness.

At first starting Messrs. Craik and Muller were in a slight measure associated with the other Dissenting Ministers of the city; but very soon a coolness became apparent, as the peculiar notions they embraced did not tally with the sentiments of “the city ministers;” and this distance has continued until very recently when, I understand, during the absence of Bishop Davis from King-street, and Broadmead having no supply, Mr. Craik was invited to preach at both these places, which he did, and was much liked by their respective congregations.