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Brother Müller and his Orphan-Work

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BROTHER MÜLLER AND HIS ORPHAN-WORK.

AMONG the curiosities of literature in our day is a work, of which four parts have appeared at intervals, entitled *The Lord's Dealings with George Müller*. The first edition of the first part was published twenty years ago, the fourth part appeared only last year. The tone of this very singular book is like that of the author of the *Bank of Faith*, who, when he wanted a new pair of trousers, prayed for them over-night, and found them by his bedside in the morning. But Huntington prayed generally for himself, George Müller takes thought of the orphan, and has accomplished in his own way a substantial work that must secure for him the respect of all good men, whatever may be the form of their religious faith.

George Müller, believing himself to be elect, is one of those who thank the Lord that they are not as other men are; it grieves him to think that in the other world he shall be parted from his natural father and his brother, who are not among the chosen. He does not believe in any gradual amelioration of the world, but looks for the return of the Lord to reign on earth, and is not without expectation that the return may be in his own day. In holding these opinions he is perfectly sincere, and he believes, with a liveliness of faith perhaps unequalled in our time, that all things fitting for His children will be supplied by our Father in heaven in direct answer to trustful prayer. He points to the Orphan-house on Ashley Down, near Bristol, for the justification of his faith. He has now been labouring in Bristol for a quarter of a century. He has undertaken large works of benevolence. He has established that asylum for destitute orphans, which for some time maintained three hundred inmates, and to which a new wing has just been added for the reception of four hundred more. He expects to add another wing and find room for a thousand. For the prosecution of this orphan-work, as he calls it, he has received ninety thousand pounds, without once asking for a penny. When he wants money he prays for it, and in his annual reports, which are summed up in the publication we have named, shows how it comes. His reports make no appeal. The spirit and intention of them is to bear testimony to the truth of which he is convinced, that "the Lord will provide," and so completely is this their intention that on one occasion when the annual meeting and report happened to fall due at a time when his distress for funds was very urgent, and to make the fact known would procure instant relief, that very circumstance compelled him to postpone for a few months the issue of the report. At another time of great want, shortly before the expiration of a year's housekeeping at the Orphan-house, when Brother Müller did not know at breakfast-time how he should buy the orphans' milk for tea, a rich friend asked him whether the balance in his accounts would be as good as heretofore. A sign of want would have produced a cheque immediately, but George Müller only said the balance will be as the Lord shall please. Of course by the annual publication of such facts as these an appeal is made to the religious sensibilities of thousands. If Brother Müller never told his prayers, and never worked to produce their fulfilment, could he depend on them for the production of an income? In his own housekeeping Brother Müller followed the same system. He destroyed the pews in his chapel; and because he felt that subscriptions to the salary of a minister were called for when it was not convenient to some to pay them, and were not always given cheerfully, he refused to accept any salary at all. Again, because free gifts paid to his hand might be made on some compulsion of pride, for the sake only of appearing to do right, and he could accept only what was given cheerfully, he caused a box to be set up in his chapel, and depended on the anonymous gifts dropped into it by members of his congregation. His deacons opened the box about once every five weeks. Sometimes he

had no bread at home, and there was money in the chapel-box. Perhaps he might then pray that a deacon's heart should be stirred up to open it, but he gave no sign of his want to any man, and never asked that the box should be opened, never if money was owing to him asked his debtor for it. Trusting in prayer only, he never starved, and has obtained more than a hundred thousand pounds for pious uses.

So much we have said, at once to secure {434} respect for Brother Müller, and to separate him from self-seeking men, who trade upon religion. A precarious subsistence – one obtained by living upon prayer – is a safe one in his eyes, but it is accompanied by him with the most energetic labour to do good work in the world. It will be seen, too, as we tell the main facts of his story, that whatever error we find in his theology, his view of a Scriptural life tallies with some of the best precepts of wordly {sic} wisdom. Contention is unscriptural. Giving offence to the consciences of others is unscriptural. Debt is unscriptural. Two bills he was once obliged to give, payable at a future day; but he did not give them until he had the amount of them already in his house, and what seemed to be most urgent temporary need afterwards failed to tempt him to the borrowing of a pound from that fund, for a day or two. The delay of an hour in payment of his rent lay on his conscience as debt. The tradesmen who supplied the Orphan-house, compelled him by their strong wish to accept of weekly bills for daily service, but whenever the supply of money ebbed, instead of covering his day of need by help of credit, he stopped even weekly payment, and allowed nothing whatever to be bought that was not paid for at the moment.

Now we will tell his story. He was born near Halberstadt, in Prussia, in the year eighteen hundred and five, so that he is now only fifty-two years old. His father, when he was five years old, removed to Heimersleben, four miles from George Müller's native town. He was then in government employment as collector of excise. Of course, we are told by Mr. Müller, bad things of his life as an unconverted boy and youth, and it does certainly appear that he was more unprincipled than boys and young men usually are. He was destined for the Church, and educated at good classical schools, acquitting himself with great credit as a scholar. In due time he became a student of the University of Halle, and as a member of that university was entitled to preach in the Lutheran establishment. Halle was at that time frequented by twelve or thirteen hundred students, of whom nine hundred studied divinity, and were allowed to preach. At Halle, when twenty years old, George Müller was taken by a fellow-student to a prayer-meeting at the house of "a believing tradesman." His conversion then began, and was assisted by the arrival at the university of Dr. Tholuck, as Professor of Divinity. George Müller's father became angry at the changed tone of his mind, and at his desire to quit the regular Prussian Church, in which only he could minister in Prussia without danger of imprisonment. Müller supported himself then by teaching German to some American professors who had come to Halle for literary purposes, being recommended to them by Professor Tholuck. He desired to be a missionary; but, without his father's consent, could not be received in any of the German missionary institutions. Soon afterwards, at the instance of a pious schoolmaster, he began to preach in a village some six miles from Halle, using the pulpit of an aged and "unenlightened clergyman."

It was in Halle that Augustus Herman Franké had been a professor of divinity at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had done charitable deeds, had shown a very lively faith in prayer, and helped by that faith had maintained an orphan-house that grew almost to the dimensions of a street. "About the time that I first began to preach," says Mr. Müller, "I lived for about two months in free lodgings, provided for poor students of divinity in the Orphan-house, built in dependence upon God by that devoted and eminent

servant of Christ, A. H. Franké, Professor of Divinity at Halle, who died 1727." The Orphan-house at Halle prompted afterwards the founding of the Orphan-house on Ashley Down; but Franké, when he built, like most builders of hospitals, anticipated coming funds, and sent a box round for subscriptions. George Müller never spent a penny till he had it actually in his hand, and as we have said, made it a further point of conscience never, in a direct way, to ask for a subscription.

Vacations at Halle left George Müller free to visit the Moravian settlement at Gnadau, where he had communion with men who were in very many respects like-minded with himself. In Halle, too, he joined himself with sundry brothers who were of his own way of mind. When at the age of twenty-two Brother Müller heard that the Continental Society in England meant to send a minister to Bucharest, to help an aged missionary, he desired to go, and had the consent of his father. Then there appeared to him an opening for work as a missionary in the conversion of the Jews, and the result of prayer and negotiation was that, after much delay caused by the refusal of the Prussian government to let a young man leave the country before he had paid his due in military service, Brother Müller came to London. He had been reported at Berlin unfit for military duty. The London Society for the Conversion of the Jews received the German student on probation, and, good scholar as he already was, placed him for six months at their seminary, where he was excused from learning anything but Hebrew. He had also to study English. He was encouraged at that time by hearing of a Mr. Groves, dentist, of Exeter, who had given up a practice yielding fifteen hundred pounds a-year to go to Persia as a missionary. A sister of that gentleman afterwards became Brother Müller's wife. While at the seminary Brother Müller's energy was not to be restrained. He began work {435} among the Jews, and read the Scriptures regularly with about fifty Jewish boys.

After a serious illness Brother Müller was obliged to go into the country for recovery of his health. He went to Teignmouth, there preached at the opening of Ebenezer Chapel, and became linked in friendship with the Brother Henry Craik, who afterwards was the associate of all his labours. Doubt was arising in George Müller's mind as to the Scriptural nature of his connection with the Society for the Conversion of the Jews. In serving the society he should serve men; whereas, was he not bound to do only the bidding of the Lord? Again, he would need to be ordained, and he could not conscientiously submit to be ordained by unconverted men, professing to communicate what they have not themselves. Also, he was not satisfied with the position of a religious society so constituted that it sought for its heads, not the best men, but the most wealthy, or those highest in worldly rank. There was no instance of a poor good man presiding over any of its meetings. After much prayer and consideration, he expressed his doubts, and his connexion with the society thenceforward ceased. He was at that time preaching in Devonshire, and designing to preach as a wandering missionary in divers parts of the country; but he was eventually persuaded to accept, on condition that he was not to be held bound to the post, the fixed office of minister to Ebenezer Chapel, Teignmouth, with fifty-five pounds as subscription from his flock. Thirty pounds of that he soon afterwards perilled by a change of view on the subject of baptism. Nearly at the same time, being twenty-five years old, he married the lady before-mentioned, and about three weeks after marriage upon conscientious scruples, gave up altogether the receipt of a fixed salary; after a few more days, he established the box in his chapel, and not long afterwards, after a much harder struggle of faith, he and his wife determined thenceforth to ask no man for help, also to lay up no treasure upon earth, but, giving all in alms, to have no care about the morrow, and trust wholly in prayer for the supply of every want. Thus, for a day of sickness, or for expected births of children, nothing ever was laid by. Excess as it came was distributed to those who needed.

For some years even the rent-day at the Orphan-house was left uncared-for till it came, when means of paying the rent could be prayed for. But in one year prayer failed; the rent was not provided until three days after the time when it lawfully fell due, and that being accepted as a Divine admonition to lay by every week the portion due on such account, it afterwards was cared for from week to week as conscientiously as it had formerly been left out of account.

In the year eighteen hundred and thirty-two, Brother Craik having already left Devonshire for Bristol, Brother Müller felt that the call on him to go also to Bristol was from Heaven. He was then travelling and preaching in various parts of Devonshire. A few days before his first journeying to Bristol he went one day to preach at Dartmouth, when, he says in his journal: – “I have five answers to prayer to-day: 1. I awoke at five, for which I had asked the Lord last night. 2. The Lord removed from my dear wife an indisposition under which she had been suffering, and it would have been trying to me to have had to leave her in that state. 3. The Lord sent us money. 4. There was a place vacant on the Dartmouth coach. 5. This evening I was assisted in preaching, and my own soul refreshed.”

At Bristol, Brother Müller shortly afterwards joined Brother Craik in ministry at Gideon chapel, establishing there (and afterwards at another chapel in the town provided for them, called Bethesda), their peculiar system of dependence for the supply of temporal wants wholly on free-will offerings. In the beginning of next year, Brother Müller was reading the life of Franké, and longing to live as he lived, that so “we might draw much more than we have as yet done out of our Heavenly Father’s bank, for our poor brethren and sisters.” At the close of the year he writes: – “It is just now four years since I first began to cast myself upon the Lord, trusting in him for the supply of my temporal wants. My little all I then had, at most worth one hundred pounds a-year, I gave up for the Lord, having then nothing left but five pounds. The Lord greatly honoured this little sacrifice, and he gave me in return, not only as much as I had given up, but much more. For during the first year he sent me already, in one way or other (including what came to me through family connection), about one hundred and thirty pounds. During the second year, one hundred and fifty-one pounds, eighteen shillings and eight pence. During the third year, one hundred and ninety-five pounds, three shillings. During this year, two hundred and sixty-seven pounds, fifteen shillings and eightpence farthing. This income of donations from the brethren, apart from the large contribution now sustaining missionary undertakings and the Orphan-house, now exceeds six hundred pounds a-year. But from first to last, at the end of each year all is gone, excess having been always given to the poor.”

It was in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-four that Brother Müller founded, at Bristol, the “Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad.” He thought believers bound to help in the extension of the faith, although the world was not to be converted until after the ingathering of the elect at the second coming. He could not work with any established society, because such societies bow before unconverted persons for the sake [{436}](#) of profit from their rank or wealth, and ask money of unbelievers, as Abraham would not have done. He rejected altogether the help of unbelievers in the conduct of his institution; but if they gave him money for it freely and unasked, he was not, by Acts, twenty-eighth chapter, second to tenth verses, warranted in refusing to accept their contributions. He rejected as unscriptural the practice of contracting debts, and then asking the charitable to assist in paying them. He based all hope of success on prayer. The object of the institution was to assist “godly” schools; to circulate the Scriptures; and to help those missionaries who worked most in what the brethren would consider a true Scriptural way. After only seven months of work, this little institution, which has now

become a large one, was instructing one hundred and twenty children in the Sunday school, two hundred and nine in the day schools, and forty adults in the adult school. It had circulated about five hundred Bibles, and contributed about fifty-seven pounds to the help of missionaries. Evidently Brother Müller is an energetic man.

“September eighteen. – A brother, a tailor, was sent to measure me for new clothes. My clothes are again getting old, and it is therefore very kind of the Lord to provide thus. September twenty-five. – A brother sent me a new hat to-day.” A few months later, a fifth day-school was established. In March, eighteen hundred and thirty, Brother Müller went on missionary business to the Continent. “At Dover,” he says, “we left the hotel before break of day, to go to the packet. All being in a great hurry, whilst we went towards the sea, I was separated from Brothers G. and Y. I now lifted up my heart to the Lord, as he generally helps me to do on such occasions, to direct my steps towards the boat which went out to meet the packet, and” (the italics are his) “*I found it almost immediately*. We had, in answer to prayer, a good passage.” On his way back, by way of Hamburg, the sea being very rough, the good brother says: – “At ten I was taken with seasickness, from which I had been kept, during my four previous short voyages, in answer to prayer; but this time I on purpose refrained from praying about it, as I did not know whether it was better for my health to be sea-sick or not.” Defect of health caused Brother Müller to go, in the next autumn, to Portishead, walk, bathe, and take horse-exercise. But he writes: – “September fifteen. – To-day, as I clearly understood that the person who lets his horse has no licence, I saw that, being bound as a believer to act according to the laws of the country, I could use it no longer; and as horse-exercise seems most important, humanly speaking, for my restoration, and as this is the only horse which is to be had in the place, we came to the conclusion to leave Portishead to-morrow.”

And now we come to the main fact: One day in November, eighteen hundred and thirty-five, George Müller writes: – “This evening I took tea at a sister’s house, where I found Franké’s life. I have frequently, for this long time, thought of labouring in a similar way, though it might be on a much smaller scale; not to imitate Franké, but in reliance on the Lord.” In five days he has made up his mind to begin. He is thirty years old. Humanly speaking, there is life before him for the work. He says: – “The three chief reasons for establishing an Orphan-house are: 1. That God may be glorified, should He be pleased to furnish me with the means, on its being seen that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him, and that thus the faith of His children may be strengthened. 2. The spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children. 3. Their temporal welfare.” He prays; he calls a public meeting at which he will state his plan, and says on the fifth of December, eighteen hundred and thirty-five, – “This evening I was struck in reading the Scriptures with these words: ‘Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.’ Up to this day I had not at all prayed concerning the means or individuals needed for the Orphan-house. I was led to apply these words to the Orphan-house, and asked the Lord for premises, a thousand pounds, and suitable individuals to take care of the children.” At the public meeting there was no collection – no money asked for, and after the meeting only ten shillings were given; but gifts soon flowed in. The design was to receive only such children as were fatherless, motherless, and wholly destitute; to feed them, clothe them, teach them, and to put them out where they could earn an honest living in the world. There should be no voting or canvassing for admissions – no restriction of the charity to children of one corner of the country. Orphanage and destitution were to form the simple claims which had only to be stated to procure admission for a child as long as there was house-room left to give. Any donation for this object was received, – odd shillings, pence, basons, mugs, four knives and five forks, a blanket, fifty pounds, twenty-nine yards of print, one plate, six teaspoons, one

skimmer, one toasting-fork, one pillow-case, one sovereign, fifty-five yards of sheeting, a clothes-horse, two pewter salt-cellar, three frocks, four pinafores, six handkerchiefs, from one friend a flat-iron stand and from another friend a flat-iron, six pots of blacking-paste, four combs, a hundred pounds, a piece of blind-line and one dozen of blind-tassels, a ton of coals, premises worth two or three thousand pounds as a gift conditional on five hundred pounds being raised to adapt them for the orphans' use, six little shirts, a hundred weight of treacle, two metal spoons, a kitchen-feuder and a pie-dish, fifty-five thimbles and five parcels of hooks and eyes; such were the gifts that flowed in upon {437} Brother Müller. He took charge of them all for his orphans. Before the conditions which would make a gift of the large premises had been fulfilled, the good brother rented the house which he had himself been occupying in Wilson Street, for the use of the orphans, fitted it for thirty little orphan girls, between the ages of seven and eleven, and opened it on the twenty-first of April, eighteen {sic} hundred and thirty-six. It began work with six-and-twenty little girls, a matron, and a governess. At the same time, Brother Müller's heart was set upon the opening of a like home for little orphan boys; but, first of all, he would set to work upon an Infant Orphan-house for desolate poor children of each sex from the tenderest age up to the seventh year. Aided by gifts, little and large – fourpence, a gallon of dry peas, tippets, old clothes, bits of bacon, sugar, money, – the work went on, and before the end of the following November, more than seven hundred pounds had been raised without one contribution having been asked for, in a direct way, by Müller himself, and the Infant Orphan-house was opened. At the end of the year sixty-six orphans were in Brother Müller's keeping, and seven hundred and seventy pounds had been the income of the Orphan-houses. Brother Müller was at work, then, for the establishment of the third Orphan-house, that for the boys.

At the end of the year following he has established it, and writes, "There are now eighty-one children in the three Orphan-houses, and nine brethren and sisters who have the care of them. Ninety, therefore, daily sit down to table. Lord, look on the necessities of thy servant!" At the same time there are the day and Sunday schools, with more than three hundred children in attendance upon each. The establishment increases, but the pressure on each day for money to buy bread is, now and then, intense. The children never miss their usual supply, though sometimes, even at dinner-time, there is no money to pay the milkman in the afternoon, and without money no milk would be taken; yet the money comes. When things are at the worst, one of the teachers has some shillings in reserve, and gives them. At one such time every brother or sister engaged in the Orphan-houses, had given up all to supply the daily wants before there came another offering to help them, from without. Under pressure of this kind Brother Müller writes in September, eighteen hundred and thirty-eight: – "I have about two hundred and twenty pounds in the bank, which, for other purposes in the Lord's work, has been intrusted to me by a brother and a sister. I might take of this money, and say but to the sister, and write but to the brother, that I have taken, in these my straits, twenty, fifty, or a hundred pounds for the orphans, and they would be quite satisfied (for both of them have liberally given for the orphans, and the brother has more than once told me, only to let him know when I wanted money); but that would be a deliverance of my own, not God's deliverance."

In eighteen hundred and forty-one, the consciences of Brothers Craik and Müller found that there was spiritual assumption in the box inscribed with their names put up for free-will offerings in the chapel. Other brethren were not less able to teach from their experiences, why should they stand apart from the rest, as if they were the only pastors? Their names were expunged, therefore, and they assigned to the poor all money found in the box that was not screwed up in paper as especially placed in it for themselves. In their

own houses, as in the Orphan-house, there was the same system of living, and the same occasional necessity of selling books or furniture to obtain food. Nevertheless, all prospered. In December, eighteen hundred and fifty, the expenses of Brother Müller's institution were at the rate of six thousand a-year, and they were met. The new Orphan-house on Ashley Down had gathered under its roof three hundred orphans, – three hundred and thirty-five inmates. There were two hundred and thirty applicants for admission. Brother Müller had felt the extent of the desolation he is working to relieve. He was encouraged by the blessing on his orphan work, and so we find him writing: "It has passed through my mind to build another Orphan-house, large enough for seven hundred orphans, so that I might be able to care for one thousand altogether."

For a time he does not speak to any human being – not even to his wife – about this matter; but he prays that he may act not as one led away by ambition to do good, that he may avoid mistake and delusion. His mind being made up, he states his plan, and waits on Heaven for a building fund. He will not begin to build till he has counted the cost and laid by the requisite provision; now it is thirty-five thousand pounds that he requires. In large and small sums money flows in, and he looks upon it as some trial of faith that, at the end of two years, he has received towards his new object donations only to the amount of twelve or thirteen thousand. This fund increasing, it at last is found prudent to begin the work by adding to the original house for the three hundred orphans a wing that will accommodate four hundred, leaving the other wing for three hundred to be afterwards supplied. The building therefore was commenced, and will be opened, we believe, before the expiration of the present year. More than twelve months ago, at the close of the volume from which we have drawn these very curious facts, George Müller wrote as follows: – "Without any one having been personally applied to for anything by me, the sum of eighty-four {438} thousand four hundred and forty-one pounds six shillings and threepence farthing has been given to me for the orphans." Probably, by Christmas next, the sum will have amounted to about a hundred thousand pounds!