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Beginning and Early Days of the Orphan Work



THAT THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH, BEING MUCH MORE
PRECIOUS THAN OF GOLD THAT PERISHETH, THOUGH IT BE TRIED
WITH FIRE, MIGHT BE FOUND UNTO PRAISE AND HONOUR AND
GLORY AT THE APPEARING OF JESUS CHRIST.—*1 Peter, 1:7*

MR. GEORGE MUELLER, the founder of the New Orphan-Houses, Ashley Down, Bristol (institutions that have been for many years the greatest monuments of modern times to a prayer-answering God), gives in that most valuable and instructive book, "A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Mueller," Vol. I., among other reasons for establishing an Orphan-House, the following:—

"Sometimes I found children of God tried in mind by the prospect of old age, when they might be unable to work any longer, and therefore were harassed by the fear of having to go into the poorhouse. If in such a case I pointed out to them, how their Heavenly Father has always helped those who put their trust in Him, they might not, perhaps, always say, that times have changed; but yet it was evident enough, that God

was not looked upon by them as the LIVING God. My spirit was oftentimes bowed down by this, and I longed to set something before the children of God, whereby they might see, that He does not forsake, even in our day, those who rely upon Him.

"Another class of persons were brethren in business, who suffered in their souls, and brought guilt on their consciences, by carrying on their business, almost in the same way as unconverted persons do. The competition in trade, the bad times, the overpeopled country, were given as reasons why, if the business were carried on simply according to the Word of God, it could not be expected to do well. Such a brother, perhaps, would express the wish, that he might be differently situated; but very rarely did I see *that there was a stand made for God, that there was the holy determination to trust in the living God, and to depend on Him, in order that a good conscience might be maintained.* To this class likewise I desired to show, by a visible proof, that God is unchangeably the same.

"Then there was another class of persons, individuals who were in professions in which they could not continue with a good conscience, or persons who were in an unscriptural position with reference to spiritual things; but both classes feared, on account of the consequences, to give up the profession in which they could not abide with God, or to leave their position, lest they should be thrown out of employment. My spirit longed to be instrumental in strengthening their faith, by giving them not only instances from the word of God, of

His willingness and ability to help all those who rely upon Him, but to show them by *proofs*, that He is the same in our day. I well knew that *the Word of God ought to be enough*, and it was, by grace, enough to me; but still, I considered that I ought to lend a helping hand to my brethren, if by any means, by this visible proof to the unchangeable faithfulness of the Lord, I might strengthen their hands in God; for I remembered what a great blessing my own soul had received through the Lord's dealings with His servant A. H. Franke, who in dependence upon the living God alone, established an immense Orphan-House, which I had seen many times with my own eyes. I, therefore, judged myself bound to be the servant of the Church of God, in the particular point on which I had obtained mercy: namely, in *being able to take God by His word and to rely upon it*. All these exercises of my soul, which resulted from the fact that so many believers, with whom I became acquainted, were harassed and distressed in mind, or brought guilt on their consciences, on account of not trusting in the Lord; were used by God to awaken in my heart the desire of setting before the church at large, and before the world, a proof that He has not in the least changed; and this seemed to me best done, by the establishing of an Orphan-House. It needed to be something which could be seen, even by the natural eye. Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House, there would be something which, with

the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God, besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was the primary reason for establishing the Orphan-House. I certainly did from my heart desire to be used by God to benefit the bodies of poor children, bereaved of both parents, and seek in other respects, with the help of God, to do them good for this life;—I also particularly longed to be used by God in getting the dear orphans trained up in the fear of God,—but still, the first and primary object of the work was (and still is): that God might be magnified by the fact, that the orphans under my care are provided with all they need, only by *prayer and faith* without anyone being asked by me or my fellow-laborers whereby it may be seen, that God is faithful still, and hears prayer still. That I was not mistaken, has been abundantly proved since November, 1835, both by the conversion of many sinners who have read the accounts, which have been published in connection with this work, and also by the abundance of fruit that has followed in the hearts of the saints, for which from my inmost soul, I desire to be grateful to God, and the honor and glory of which not only is due to Him alone, but, which I, by His help, am enabled to ascribe to Him."

"Open Thy Mouth Wide"

In the account written by Mr. Mueller dated January 16, 1836, respecting the Orphan-House intended to be estab-

lished in Bristol in connection with the Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad, we read:—

“When, of late, the thoughts of establishing an Orphan-House, in dependence upon the Lord, revived in my mind, during the first two weeks I only prayed that if it were of the Lord, He would bring it about, but if not that He graciously would be pleased to take all thoughts about it out of my mind. My uncertainty about knowing the Lord’s mind did not arise from questioning whether it would be pleasing in His sight, that there should be an abode and Scriptural education provided for destitute fatherless and motherless children; but whether it were His will that I should be the instrument of setting such an object on foot, as my hands were already more than filled. My comfort, however, was, that, if it were His will, He would provide not merely the means, but also suitable individuals to take care of the children, so that my part of the work would take only such a portion of my time, as, considering the importance of the matter, I might give, notwithstanding my many other engagements. The whole of those two weeks I never asked the Lord for money or for persons to engage in the work.

“On December 5th, however, the subject of my prayer all at once became different. I was reading Psalm 131, and was particularly struck, more than at any time before, with verse 10: *“Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”* I thought a few moments about these words, and then was led to apply them

to the case of the Orphan-House. It struck me that I had never asked the Lord for anything concerning it, except to know His will, respecting its being established or not; and I then fell on my knees and opened my mouth wide, asking Him for much. I asked in submission to His will, and without fixing a time when He should answer my petition. I prayed that He would give me a house, i. e., either as a loan, or that someone might be led to pay the rent for one, or that one might be given permanently for this object; further, I asked Him for £1000; and likewise for suitable individuals to take care of the children. Besides this, I have been since led to ask the Lord, to put into the hearts of His people to send me articles of furniture for the house, and some clothes for the children. When I was asking the petition, I was fully aware what I was doing, i.e., that I was asking for something which I had no natural prospect of obtaining from the brethren whom I know, but which was not too much for the Lord to grant."

"December 10, 1835.—This morning I received a letter, in which a brother and sister wrote thus:—'We propose ourselves for the service of the intended Orphan-House, if you think us qualified for it; also to give up all the furniture, &c.' which the Lord has given us, for its use; and to this without receiving any salary whatever; believing that if it be the will of the Lord to employ us, He will supply all our needs, &c."

"Dec. 13.—A brother was influenced this day to give 4s. per week, or £10 8s yearly, as long as the Lord gives the means;

8s. was given by him as two weeks' subscriptions. Today a brother and sister offered themselves, with all their furniture, and all the provisions which they have in the house, if they can be usefully employed in the concerns of the Orphan-House."

A Great Encouragement

"Dec. 17.—I was rather cast down last evening and this morning about the matter, questioning whether I ought to be engaged in this way, and was led to ask the Lord to give me some further encouragement. Soon after were sent by a brother two pieces of print, the one seven and the other 23 3/4 yards, 6 3/4 yards of calico, four pieces of lining, about four yards altogether, a sheet, and a yard measure. This evening another brother brought a clothes horse, three frocks, four pinafores, six handkerchiefs, three counterpanes, one blanket, two pewter salt cellars, six tin cups, and six metal tea spoons; he also brought 3s. 6d. given to him by three different individuals. At the same time he told me that it had been put into the heart of an individual to send tomorrow £100."

One Thousand Pounds

"June 15, 1837.—Today I gave myself once more earnestly to prayer respecting the remainder of the £1000. This evening £5 was given, so that now the whole sum is made up. To the Glory of the Lord, whose I am, and whom I serve, I would state again, that every shilling of this money, and all the articles

of clothing and furniture, which have been mentioned in the foregoing pages, have been given to me, *without one single individual having been asked by me for anything.*"

Orphans for the Building

In a third statement, containing the announcement of the opening of the Orphan-House, for destitute female children, and a proposal for the establishment of an Infant Orphan-House, which was sent to the press on May 18, 1836, Mr. Mueller wrote:—

"So far as I remember, I brought even the most minute circumstances concerning the Orphan-House before the Lord in my petitions, being conscious of my own weakness and ignorance. There was, however, one point I never had prayed about, namely that the Lord would send children; for I naturally took it for granted that there would be plenty of applications. The nearer, however, the day came which had been appointed for receiving applications, the more I had a secret consciousness, that the Lord might disappoint my natural expectations, and show me that I could not prosper in one single thing without Him. The appointed time came, and not even one application was made. I had before this been repeatedly tried, whether I might not, after all, against the Lord's mind, have engaged in the work. This circumstance now led me to lie low before my God in prayer the whole of the evening, February 3, and to examine my heart once more as to all the motives concern-

ing it; and being able, as formerly, to say, that His glory was my chief aim, i.e., that it might be seen that it is not a vain thing to trust in the living God,—and that my second aim was the spiritual welfare of the orphan-children,—and the third their bodily welfare; and still continuing in prayer, I was at last brought to this state, that I could say *from my heart*, that I should rejoice in God being glorified in this matter, though it were *by bringing the whole to nothing*. But as still, after all, it seemed to me more tending to the glory of God, to establish and prosper the Orphan-House, I could then ask Him heartily, to send applications. I enjoyed now a peaceful state of heart concerning the subject, and was also more assured than ever that God would establish it. *The very next day*, February 4, the first application was made, and since then 42 more have been made."

"Just for Today"

Later on, when there were nearly 100 persons to be maintained, and the funds were reduced to about £20, Mr. Mueller writes:—

"July 22 [1838].—This evening I was walking in our little garden, meditating on Heb. xiii. 8, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Whilst meditating on His unchangeable love, power, wisdom, &c.—and turning all, as I went on, into prayer respecting myself; and whilst applying likewise His unchangeable love, and power and wisdom, &c,

both to my present spiritual and temporal circumstances:—all at once the present need of the Orphan-House was brought to my mind. Immediately I was led to say to myself, Jesus in His love and power has hitherto supplied me with what I have needed for the Orphans, and in the same unchangeable love and power He will provide me with what I may need for the future. A flow of joy came into my soul whilst realising thus the unchangeableness of our adorable Lord. About one minute after, a letter was brought me, enclosing a bill for £20. In it was written: "Will you apply the amount of the enclosed bill to the furtherance of the objects of your Scriptural Knowledge Society, or of your Orphan Establishment, or in the work and cause of our Master in any way that He Himself, on your application to Him, may point out to you. It is not a great sum, but it is a sufficient provision for the exigency of today; and it is for today's exigencies, that, ordinarily, the Lord provides. Tomorrow, as it brings its demands, will find its supply, etc."

"[Of this £20 I took £10 for the Orphan fund, and £10 for the other objects, and was thus enabled to meet the expenses of about £34 which, in connection with the Orphan-Houses, came upon me within four days afterwards, and which I knew beforehand would come.]"

Waiting for Help

"Nov. 21, 1838.—Never were we so reduced in funds as today. There was not a single half-penny in hand between the

matrons of the three houses. Nevertheless there was a good dinner, and by managing so as to help one another with bread, etc., there was a prospect of getting over this day also; but for none of the houses had we the prospect of being able to take in bread. When I left the brethren and sisters at one o'clock, after prayer, I told them that we must wait for help, and see how the Lord would deliver us this time. I was sure of help, but we were indeed straitened. When I came to Kingsdown, I felt that I needed more exercise, being very old; wherefore I went on the nearest way home, but round by Clarence Place. About twenty yards from my house, I met a brother who walked back with me, and after a little conversation gave me £10 to be handed over to the brethren, the deacons, towards providing the poor saints with coals, blankets and warm clothing; also £5 for the Orphans, and £5 for the other objects of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution. The brother had called twice while I was gone to the Orphan-Houses, and had I now been one *half minute* later, I should have missed him. But the Lord knew our need, and therefore allowed me to meet him. I sent off the £ 5 immediately to the matrons."

Beyond Disappointment

"Sept. 21 [1840], Monday. By what was in hand for the Orphans, and by what had come in yesterday, the need of today is more than supplied, as there is enough for tomorrow also. Today a brother from the neighbourhood of London gave me £10, to

be laid out as it might be most needed. As we have been praying many days for the School,—Bible,—and Missionary Funds, I took it all for them. This brother knew nothing about our work, when he came three days since to Bristol. Thus the Lord, to show His continued care over us, raises up new helpers. They that trust in the Lord shall never be confounded! Some who helped for a while may fall asleep in Jesus; others may grow cold in the service of the Lord; others may be as desirous as ever to help, but have no longer the means; others may have both a willing heart to help, and have also the means, but may see it the Lord's will to lay them out in another way;—and thus, from one cause or another, were we to lean upon man, we should surely be confounded; but, in leaning upon the living God alone, we are BEYOND *disappointment*, and BEYOND *being forsaken because of death, or want of means, or want of love, or because of the claims of other work*. How precious to have learned in any measure to stand with God alone in the world, and yet to be happy, and to know that surely no good thing shall be withheld from us whilst we walk uprightly!"

A Great Sinner Converted

In his REVIEW OF THE YEAR 1841, Mr. Mueller writes:—

"During this year I was informed about the conversion of one of the very greatest sinners that I ever heard of in all my service for the Lord. Repeatedly I fell on my knees with his wife, and asked the Lord for his conversion, when she came

to me in the deepest distress of soul, on account of the most barbarous and cruel treatment that she received from him, in his bitter enmity against her for the Lord's sake, and because he could not provoke her to be in a passion, and *she would not* strike him again, and the like. At the time when it was at its worst I pleaded especially on his behalf the promise in Matthew xviii. 19: 'Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven.' And now this awful persecutor is converted."

Prayer for Spiritual Blessing Among the Saints

"On May 25th, I began to ask the Lord for greater real spiritual prosperity among the saints, among whom I labour in Bristol, than there ever yet had been among them; and now I have to record to the praise of the Lord that truly He has answered this request; for, considering all things, at no period has there been more manifestation of grace and truth, and spiritual power among us, than there is now while I am writing this for the press (1845). Not that we have attained to what we might; we are far, very far from it; but the Lord has been very, very good to us, and we have most abundant cause for thanksgiving."

Withholding the Report

"Dec. 9 [1841].—Today came in for the Orphans by the sale of stockings 10s. 10d.—We are now brought to the close of

the sixth year of this part of the work, *having only in hand the money which has been put by for the rent*; but during the whole of this year we have been supplied with all that was needed.

"During the last three years we had closed the accounts on this day, and had, a few days after, some public meetings, at which, for the benefit of the hearers, we stated how the Lord had dealt with us during the year, and the substance of what had been stated at these meetings was afterwards printed for the benefit of the church at large. This time, however, it appeared to us better to delay for a while both the public meetings and the publishing of the Report. Through grace we had learned to lean upon the Lord only, being assured, that, if we were never to speak or write one single word more about this work, yet should we be supplied with means, as long as He should enable us to depend on Himself alone. But whilst we neither had had those public meetings for the purpose of exposing our necessity, nor had had the account of the Lord's dealings with us published for the sake of working thereby upon the feelings of the readers, and thus inducing them to give money, but only that we might by our experience benefit other saints; yet it might have appeared to some that, in making known our circumstances, we were actuated by some such motives. What better proof, therefore, could we give of our depending upon the living God alone, and not upon public meetings or printed Reports, than that, *in the midst of our deep poverty*, instead

of being glad for the time to have come when we could make known our circumstances, we still went on quietly for some time longer, without saying anything. We therefore determined, as we sought and still seek in this work to act for the profit of the saints generally, to delay both the public meetings and the Report for a few months. *Naturally* we should have been, of course, as glad as anyone to have exposed our poverty at that time; but *spiritually* we were unable to delight even then in the prospect of the increased benefit that might be derived by the church at large from our acting as we did.

* * * *

"Dec. 18, Saturday morning. There is now the greatest need, and only 4d. in hand, which I found in the box at my house; yet I fully believe the Lord will supply us this day also with all that is required.—Pause a few moments, dear reader! Observe two things! We acted *for God* in delaying the public meetings and the publishing of the Report; but *God's way leads always into trial, so far as sight and sense are concerned. Nature always will be tried in God's ways.* The Lord was saying by this poverty, 'I will now see whether you truly lean upon me, and whether you truly look to me.' Of all the seasons that I had ever passed through since I had been living in this way, up to *that time*, I never knew any period in which my faith was tried so sharply, as during the four months from Dec. 12, 1841, to April 12, 1842. But observe further: We might even now have altered our minds with respect to the public meetings

and publishing the Report; *for no one knew our determination, at this time*, concerning the point. Nay, on the contrary, we knew with what delight very many children of God were looking forward to receive further accounts. But the Lord kept us steadfast to the conclusion, at which we had arrived under His guidance."

"He Abideth Faithful"

Under the date Jan. 25, 1842, Mr. Mueller writes: —

"Perhaps, dear reader, you have said in your heart before you have read thus far: 'How would it be, suppose the funds for the Orphans were reduced to nothing, and those who are engaged in the work had nothing of their own to give, and a meal time were come, and you had no food for the children.'

"Thus indeed it may be, for our hearts are desperately wicked. If ever we should be so left to ourselves, as that either we depend no more upon the living God, or that 'we regard iniquity in our hearts,' then such a state of things, we have reason to believe, would occur. But so long as we shall be enabled to trust in the living God, and so long as, though falling short in every way of what we might be, and ought to be, we are at least kept from living in sin, such a state of things cannot occur. Therefore, dear reader, if you yourself walk with God, and if, on that account, His glory is dear to you, I affectionately and earnestly entreat you to beseech Him to uphold us; for how awful would be the disgrace brought upon His holy