

ABOVE THEIR STATION

The education policy which George Müller devised, was of a high standard and comprised a wide variety of subjects. He was often criticized for his high standard of education which was often described as 'above their station'. Only a few years earlier, Dr Andrew Bell had written in his book - 'An experiment in Education' - 'There was a risk of elevating by an indiscriminate education, the minds of those doomed to the drudgery of daily labour, above their condition and thereby rendering them discontented and unhappy with their lot.'

George Müller did not agree. In fact he employed a School Inspector to maintain the high standards. In 1885 the average percentage of all children in their annual examination based on six subjects was 91.1%. Because of the duration of the education provided by George Müller, he was accused of robbing factories, mills and mines of labour. He was not deterred however, and kept the boys until they were 14 and the girls until they were 17.

The children had other duties to perform. Boys learnt to knit and darn socks, make beds, clean shoes, scrub rooms, work in the garden and run errands. The girls helped in the kitchens, sculleries, wash houses and laundries.

Discipline at the Homes was strict but not harsh. Children who exerted an unacceptable influence on others, were expelled. The usual form of punishment was corporal which was an acceptable form of discipline in those days.

There was not a great deal of variation in the food but it was wholesome and regular. Porridge every morning for breakfast and meat for dinner on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. On Tuesdays and Sundays a dish of rice and raisins was commonplace. On Saturdays they were served broth with meat in it. Meat was either mutton - known to the children as 'Og' or corned beef. The bread was known as 'Toke' because of the grace said at meals 'We thank thee, Lord, for these tokens of thy love!' Fresh fruit and eggs were in plentiful supply and milk and water was the usual drink.

Charles Dickens once visited the Orphanage upon hearing rumors of starvation. After inspection, he left wholly satisfied that the children were adequately fed. On special occasions such as George Müller's birthday they were each given cake and an enormous apple dumpling to mark the anniversary. Christmas was also an occasion for special food and one year 150 pheasants were received from a donor in Cornwall.

The annual outing to Purdown, a field within walking distance from the Orphanage, was a most popular event as was Christmas with its trees, decorations, presents, carols, games and parties.

The children were awakened at six in the morning and after breakfast at eight there was a Bible reading and a time of prayer.

The evening session often included an outside guest speaker.

No child left the Müller Homes until employment had been found for them. The boys were apprenticed to a trade and some with the ability to teacher training. They were always provided with three suits and a sum of money. The girls left at 17 and went into domestic service, nursing or teacher training, they too were provided with an outfit of clothes and some money. George Müller gave his blessing to every child on leaving his care, and gave to each a Bible.

As one orphan recalled upon leaving, 'My belongings were my Bible, my clothes and half a crown and, best of all, was the priceless blessing of George Müller's prayers.'

Despite George Müller's death in 1898 the Homes continued to operate in the same way with the same principles. There are many fine testimonies to the Müller Homes but a former Müller child, Edith Larby, sums up what many of the 18,000 children who have been through the Homes can testify,

'The greatest thing that has ever happened to me was at the Müller Homes because there I learnt about the Lord Jesus. Through the teaching that had been put into my heart as a child, I gave that same heart to the Lord one day, and I have never regretted it.'