

GEORGE MUELLER OF BRISTOL  
AND HIS WITNESS TO A PRAYER-HEARING GOD  
1899

The originally "authorized memoir".

BY  
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**"The Narrative Of The Lord's Dealings"**

THINGS which are sacred forbid even a careless touch. The record written by George Mueller of the Lord's Dealings reads, especially in parts, almost like an inspired writing, because it is simply the tracing of divine guidance in a human life-- not this man's own working or planning, suffering or serving, but *the Lord's dealings* with him and workings through him.

It reminds us of that conspicuous passage in the Acts of the Apostles where, within the compass of twenty verses, God is fifteen times put boldly forward as the one Actor in all events. Paul and Barnabas rehearsed, in the ears of the church at Antioch, and afterward at Jerusalem, not what *they had done* for the Lord, but all that *He had done with them*, and how *He had opened* the door of faith unto the Gentiles; what miracles and wonders *God had wrought* among the Gentiles *by them*. And, in the same spirit, Peter before the council emphasizes how God had made choice of his mouth, as that whereby the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe; how He had given them the Holy Ghost and put no difference between Jew and Gentile, purifying their hearts by faith; and how He who knew all hearts had thus borne them witness. Then James, in the same strain, refers to the way in which *God had visited* the Gentiles *to take out* of them a people for His name; and concludes by two quotations or adaptations from the Old Testament, which fitly sum up the whole matter:

"The Lord who doeth all these things."

"Known unto God are *all His works* from the beginning of the world."

(Acts xiv. 27 to xv. 18.)

The meaning of such repeated phraseology cannot be mistaken. God is here presented as the one agent or actor, and even the most conspicuous apostles, like Paul and Peter, as only His instruments. No twenty verses in the word of God contain more emphatic and repeated lessons on man's insufficiency and nothingness, and God's all-sufficiency and almightiness. It was God that wrought upon man through man. It was He who chose Peter to be His mouthpiece, He whose key unlocked shut doors, He who visited the nations,

who turned sinners into saints, who was even then taking out a people for His name, purifying hearts and bearing them witness; it was He and He alone who did all these wondrous things, and according to His knowledge and plan of what He would do, from the beginning. We are not reading so much the Acts of the Apostles as the acts of God through the apostles. Was it not this very passage in this inspired book that suggested, perhaps, the name of this journal: "The Lord's dealings with George Mueller"?

At this narrative or journal, as a whole, we can only rapidly glance. In this shorter account, purposely condensed to secure a wider reading even from busy people, that narrative could not be more fully treated, for in its original form it covers about three thousand printed pages and contains close to one million words. To such as can and will read that more minute account it is accessible at a low rate,\* and is strongly recommended for careful and leisurely perusal. But for the present purpose the life-story, as found in these pages, takes both a briefer and a different form.

\* Five volumes at 16s. Published by Jas. Nisbet & Co., London. With subsequent Annual Reports at 3d. each.

The journal is largely composed of, condensed from, and then supplemented by, annual reports of the work, and naturally and necessarily includes, not only thousands of little details, but much inevitable repetition year by year, because each new report was likely to fall into the hands of some who had never read reports of the previous years. The desire and design of this briefer memoir is to present the salient points of the narrative, to review the whole life-story as from the great summits or outlooks found in this remarkable journal; so that, like the observer who from some high mountain-peak looks toward the different points of the compass, and thus gets a rapid, impressive, comparative, and comprehensive view of the whole landscape, the reader may, as at a glance, take in those marked features of this godly man's character and career which incite to new and advance steps in faith and holy living. Some few characteristic entries in the journal will find here a place; others, only in substance while of the bulk of them it will be sufficient to give a general survey, classifying the leading facts, and under each class giving a few representative examples and illustrations.

Looking at this narrative as a whole, certain prominent peculiarities must be carefully noted. We have here a record and revelation of seven conspicuous experiences:

1. An experience of frequent and at times prolonged *financial straits*.

The money in hand for personal needs, and for the needs of hundreds and thousands of orphans, and for the various branches of the work of the Scripture Knowledge Institution, was often reduced to a single pound, or even penny, and sometimes to nothing. There was therefore a necessity for constant waiting on God, looking to Him directly for all supplies. For months, if not years, together, and at several periods in the work, supplies were furnished only from month to month, week to week, day to day, *hour to hour!* Faith was thus kept in lively exercise and under perpetual training.

2. An experience of the *unchanging faithfulness of the Father-God*.

The straits were long and trying, but never was there one case of failure to receive help; never a meal-time without at least a frugal meal, never a want or a crisis unmet by divine supply and support. Mr. Mueller said to the writer: "Not once, or five times, or five hundred times, but thousands of times in these threescore years, have we had in hand not enough *for one more meal*, either in food or in funds ; but not once has God failed us; not once have we or the orphans gone hungry or lacked any good thing." From 1838 to 1844 was a period of peculiar and prolonged straits, yet when the time of need actually came the supply was always given, though often at the last moment.

3. An experience of the working of God upon the minds, hearts, and consciences of *contributors to the work*.

It will amply repay one to plod, step by step, over these thousands of pages, if only to trace the hand of God touching the springs of human action all over the world in ways of His own, and at times of great need, and adjusting the amount and the exact day and hour of the supply, to the existing want. Literally from the earth's ends, men, women, and children who had never seen Mr. Mueller and could have known nothing of the pressure at the time, have been led at the exact crisis of affairs to send aid in the very sum or form most needful. In countless cases, while he was on his knees asking, the answer has come in such close correspondence with the request as to shut out *chance* as an explanation, and compel belief in a prayer-hearing God.

4. An experience of habitual *hanging upon the unseen God* and nothing else.

The reports, issued annually to acquaint the public with the history and progress of the work, and give an account of stewardship to the many donors who had a right to a report - these made *no direct appeal for aid*. At one time, and that of great need, Mr. Mueller felt led to *withhold* the usual annual statement, lest some might construe the account of work already done as an appeal for aid in work yet to be done, and thus detract from the glory of the Great Provider.\* The Living God alone was and is the Patron of these institutions; and not even the wisest and wealthiest, the noblest and the most influential of human beings, has ever been looked to as their dependence.

\*For example, Vol. II, 102, records that the report given is for 1846-1848, no report having been issued for 1847; and on page 113, under date of May 25th, occur these words: "not being nearly enough to meet the housekeeping expenses," etc.; and, May 28th and 30th, such other words as these: "now our poverty," "in this our great need," "in these days of straitness." Mr. Wright thinks that *on that very account* Mr. Mueller did not publish the report for 1847.

5. An experience of conscientious *care in accepting and using gifts*.

Here is a pattern for all who act as stewards for God. Whenever there was any ground of misgiving as to the propriety or expediency of receiving what was offered, it was declined, however pressing the need, unless or until all such objectionable features no more existed. If the party contributing was known to dishonour lawful debts, so that the money was righteously due to others; if the gift was encumbered and embarrassed by

restrictions that hindered its free use for God; if it was designated for endowment purposes or as a provision for Mr. Mueller's old age, or for the future of the institutions; or if there was any evidence or suspicion that the donation was given grudgingly, reluctantly, or for self-glory, it was promptly declined and returned. In some cases, even where large amounts were involved, parties were urged to wait until more prayer and deliberation made clear that they were acting under divine leading.

6. An experience of extreme caution lest there should be even a careless *betrayal of the fact of pressing need*, to the outside public.

The helpers in the institutions were allowed to come into such close fellowship and to have such knowledge of the exact state of the work as aids not only in common labours, but in common prayers and self-denials. Without such acquaintance they could not serve, pray, nor sacrifice intelligently. But these associates were most solemnly and repeatedly charged never to reveal to those without, not even in the most serious crises, any want whatsoever of the work. The one and only resort was ever to be the God who hears the cry of the needy; and the greater the exigency, the greater the caution lest there should even seem to be a looking away from divine to human help.

7. An experience of growing boldness of faith *in asking and trusting for great things*.

As faith was exercised it was energized, so that it became as easy and natural to ask confidently for a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand pounds, as once it had been for a pound or a penny. After confidence in God had been strengthened through discipline, and God had been proven faithful, it required no more *venture* to cast himself on God for provision for two thousand children and an annual outlay of at least twenty-five thousand pounds for them than in the earlier periods of the work to look to Him to care for twenty homeless orphans at a cost of two hundred and fifty pounds a year. Only by *using* faith are we kept from practically *losing* it, and, on the contrary, to use faith is to lose the unbelief that hinders God's mighty acts.

This brief résumé of the contents of thousands of entries is the result of a repeated and careful examination of page after page where have been patiently recorded with scrupulous and punctilious exactness the innumerable details of Mr. Mueller's long experience as a co-worker with God. He felt himself not only the steward of a celestial Master, but the trustee of human gifts, and hence he sought to "provide things honest in the sight of all men." He might never have published a report or spread these minute matters before the public eye, and yet have been an equally faithful steward toward God; but he would not in such case have been an equally faithful trustee toward *man*.

Frequently, in these days, men receive considerable sums of money from various sources for benevolent work, and yet give no account of such trusteeship. However honest such parties may be, they not only act unwisely, but, by their course, lend sanction to others with whom such irresponsible action is a cloak for systematic fraud. Mr. Mueller's whole career is the more without fault because in this respect his administration of his great trust challenges the closest investigation.

The brief review of the lessons taught in his journal may well startle the incredulous and unbelieving spirit of our skeptical day. Those who doubt the power of prayer to bring down actual blessing, or who confound faith in God with credulity and superstition, may well wonder and perhaps stumble at such an array of facts. But, if any reader is still doubtful as to the facts, or thinks they are here arrayed in a deceptive garb or invested with an imaginative halo, he is hereby invited to examine for himself the singularly minute records which George Mueller has been led of God to put before the world in a printed form which thus admits no change, and to accompany with a bold and repeated challenge to any one so inclined, to subject every statement to the severest scrutiny, and prove, if possible, one item to be in any respect false, exaggerated, or misleading. The absence of all enthusiasm in the calm and mathematical precision of the narrative compels the reader to feel that the writer was almost mechanically exact in the record, and inspires confidence that it contains the absolute, naked truth.

One caution should, like Habakkuk's gospel message-- "The just shall live by his faith"-- be written large and plain so that even a cursory glance may take it in. Let no one ascribe to George Mueller such a miraculous gift of faith as lifted him above common believers and out of the reach of the temptations and infirmities to which all fallible souls are exposed. He was constantly liable to satanic assaults, and we find him making frequent confession of the same sins as others, and even of unbelief, and at times overwhelmed with genuine sorrow for his departures from God. In fact he felt himself rather more than usually wicked by nature, and utterly helpless even as a believer: was it not this poverty of spirit and mourning over sin, this consciousness of entire unworthiness and dependence, that so drove him to the throne of grace and the all-merciful and all-powerful Father? Because he was so weak, he leaned hard on the strong arm of Him whose strength is not only manifested, but can only be made perfect, in weakness.\*

\*1 Cor. xii.1-10.

To those who think that no man can wield such power in prayer or live such a life of faith who is not an exception to common mortal frailties, it will be helpful to find in this very journal that is so lighted up with the records of God's goodness, the dark shadows of conscious sin and guilt. Even in the midst of abounding mercies and interpositions he suffered from temptations to distrust and disobedience, and sometimes had to mourn their power over him, as when once he found himself inwardly complaining of the cold leg of mutton which formed the staple of his Sunday dinner!

We discover as we read that we are communing with a man who was not only of like passions with ourselves, but who felt himself rather more than most others subject to the sway of evil, and needing therefore a special keeping power. Scarce had he started upon his new path of entire dependence on God, when he confessed himself "so sinful" as for some time to entertain the thought that "it would be of no use to trust in the Lord in this way," and fearing that he had perhaps gone already too far in this direction in having committed himself to such a course.\* True, this temptation was speedily overcome and Satan confounded; but from time to time similar fiery darts were hurled at him which had to be quenched by the same shield of faith. Never, to the last hour of life, could he trust

himself, or for one moment relax his hold on God, and neglect the word of God and prayer, without falling into sin. The "old man" of sin always continued too strong for George Mueller alone, and the longer he lived a "life of trust" the less was his trust placed upon himself.

\*Vol. I.73.

Another fact that grows more conspicuous with the perusal of every new page in his journal is that in things common and small, as well as uncommon and great, he took no step without first asking counsel of the oracles of God and seeking guidance from Him in believing prayer. It was his life-motto to learn the will of God before undertaking anything, and to wait till it is clear, because only so can one either be blessed in his own soul or prospered in the work of his hands.\* Many disciples who are comparatively bold to seek God's help in great crises, fail to come to Him with like boldness in matters that seem too trivial to occupy the thought of God or invite the interposition of Him who numbers the very hairs of our heads and suffers not one hair to perish. The writer of this journal escaped this great snare and carried even the smallest matter to the Lord.

Again, in his journal he constantly seeks to save from reproach the good name of Him whom he serves: he cannot have such a God accounted a hard Master. So early as July, 1831, a false rumour found circulation that he and his wife were half-starving and that certain bodily ailments were the result of a lack of the necessities of life; and he is constrained to put on record that, though often brought so low as not to have one penny left and to have the last bread on the table, they had never yet sat down to a meal unprovided with some nourishing food. This witness was repeated from time to time, and until just before his departure for the Father's house on high; and it may therefore be accepted as covering that whole life of faith which reached over nearly threescore years and ten.

\*Vol. I.74.

A kindred word of testimony, first given at this same time and in like manner reiterated from point to point in his pilgrimage, concerns the Lord's faithfulness in accompanying His word with power, in accordance with that positive and unequivocal promise in Isaiah lv.11:

"My word shall not return unto Me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

It is very noticeable that this is not said of man's word, however wise, important, or sincere, but of *God's* word. We are therefore justified in both expecting and claiming that, just so far as our message is not of human invention or authority, but is God's message through us, it shall never fail to accomplish His pleasure and its divine errand, whatever be its apparent failure at the time. Mr. Mueller, referring to his own preaching, bears witness that in almost if not quite every place where he spoke God's word, whether in larger chapels or smaller rooms, the Lord gave the seal of His own testimony. He observed, however, that blessing did not so obviously or abundantly follow his open-air

services: only in one instance had it come to his knowledge that there were marked results, and that was in the case of an army officer who came to make sport. Mr. Mueller thought that it might please the Lord not to let him see the real fruit of his work in open-air meetings, or that there had not been concerning them enough believing prayer; but he concluded that such manner of preaching was not his present work, since God had not so conspicuously sealed it with blessing.

His journal makes very frequent reference to the physical weakness and disability from which he suffered. The struggle against bodily infirmity was almost life-long, and adds a new lesson to his life-story. The strength of faith had to triumph over the weakness of the flesh. We often find him suffering from bodily ills, and sometimes so seriously as to be incapacitated for labour.

For example, early in 1832 he broke a blood-vessel in the stomach and lost much blood by the hemorrhage. The very day following was the Lord's day, and four outside preaching stations needed to be provided for, from which his disablement would withdraw one labourer to take his place at home. After an hour of prayer he felt that faith was given him to rise, dress, and go to the chapel; and, though very weak, so that the short walk wearied him, he was helped to preach as usual. After the service a medical friend remonstrated against his course as tending to permanent injury; but he replied that he should himself have regarded it presumptuous had not the Lord given him the faith. He preached both afternoon and evening, growing stronger rather than weaker with each effort, and suffering from no reaction afterward.

In reading Mr. Mueller's biography and the record of such experiences, it is not probable that all will agree as to the wisdom of his course in every case. Some will commend, while others will, perhaps, condemn. He himself qualifies this entry in his journal with a wholesome caution that no reader should in such a matter follow his example, who *has not faith given him*; but assuring him that if God does give faith so to undertake for Him, such trust will prove like good coin and be honoured when presented. He himself did not always pursue a like course, because he had not always a like faith, and this leads him in his journal to draw a valuable distinction between the gift of faith and the grace of faith, which deserves careful consideration.

He observed that repeatedly he prayed with the sick till they were restored, he *asking unconditionally for the blessing of bodily health*, a thing which, he says, later on, he could not have done. Almost always in such cases the petition was granted, yet in some instances not. Once, in his own case, as early as 1829, he had been healed of a bodily infirmity of long standing, and which never returned. Yet this same man of God subsequently suffered from disease which was not in like manner healed, and in more than one case submitted to a costly operation at the hands of a skillful surgeon.

Some will doubtless say that even this man of faith lacked the faith necessary for the healing of his own body; but we must let him speak for himself, and especially as he gives his own view of the gift and the grace of faith. He says that the *gift* of faith is exercised, whenever we "do or believe a thing where the not doing or not believing

would *not* be sin"; but the *grace* of faith, "where we do or believe what not to do or believe *would* be sin"; in one case we have no unequivocal command or promise to guide us, and in the other we have. The gift of faith is not always in exercise, but the grace must be, since it has the definite word of God to rest on, and the absence or even weakness of faith in such circumstances implies sin. There were instances, he adds, in which it pleased the Lord at times to bestow upon him something like the gift of faith so that he could ask unconditionally and expect confidently.

This journal we may now dismiss as a whole, having thus looked at the general features which characterize its many pages. But let it be repeated that to any reader who will for himself carefully examine its contents its perusal will prove a means of grace. To read a little at a time, and follow it with reflection and self-examination, will be found most stimulating to faith, though often most humiliating by reason of the conscious contrast suggested by the reader's unbelief and unfaithfulness. This man lived peculiarly with God and in God, and his senses were exercised to discern good and evil. His conscience became increasingly sensitive and his judgment singularly discriminating, so that he detected fallacies where they escape the common eye, and foresaw dangers which, like hidden rocks ahead, risk danger and, perhaps, destruction to service if not to character. And, therefore, so far is the writer of this memoir from desiring to displace that journal, that he rather seeks to incite many who have not read it to examine it for themselves. It will to such be found to mark a path of close daily walk with God, where, step by step, with circumspect vigilance, conduct and even motive are watched and weighed in God's own balances.

To sum up very briefly the impression made by the close perusal of this whole narrative with the supplementary annual reports, it is simply this: CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

In a little sketch of Beaté Paulus, the Frau Pastorin pleads with God in a great crisis not to forsake her, quaintly adding that she was "willing to be the *second* whom He might forsake," but she was "determined not to be the *first*."\* George Mueller believed that, in all ages, there had never yet been one true and trusting believer to whom God had proven false or faithless, and he was perfectly sure that He could be safely trusted who, "if we believe not, yet abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." † God has not only spoken, but sworn; His word is confirmed by His oath: because He could swear by no greater He swore by Himself. And all this that we might have a strong consolation; that we might have boldness in venturing upon Him, laying hold and holding fast His promise. Unbelief makes God a liar and, worse still, a *perjurer*, for it accounts Him as not only false to His word, but to His oath. George Mueller believed, and because he believed, prayed; and praying, expected; and expecting, received. Blessed is he that believes, for there shall be a performance of those things which are spoken of the Lord.

\* Faith's Miracles, p. 48.

† 2 Timothy ii.13.