

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

The originally "authorized memoir".

BY  
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**The Manifold Grace Of God**

SOME one has quaintly said, in commenting upon the Twenty-third Psalm, that "the coach in which the Lord's saints ride has not only a driver, but two footmen"--

*"goodness and mercy shall follow me."*

Surely these two footmen of the Lord, in their celestial livery of grace, followed George Mueller all the days of his life. Wonderful as is the story of the building of those five orphan houses on Ashley Down, many other events and experiences no less showed the goodness and mercy of God, and must not be unrecorded in these pages, if we are to trace, however imperfectly, His gracious dealings; and having, by one comprehensive view, taken in the story of the orphan homes, we may retrace our steps to the years when the first of these houses was planned, and, following another path, look at Mr. Mueller's personal and domestic life.

He himself loved to trace the Lord's goodness and mercy, and he saw abundant proofs that they had followed him. A few instances may be given, from different departments of experience, as representative examples.

The Lord's tender care was manifest as to his beloved daughter Lydia. It became clear in the year 1843, that, both for the relief of the mother and the profit of the daughter, it would be better that Lydia should be taught elsewhere than at home; and in answer to prayer, her father was divinely directed to a Christian sister, whose special gifts in the way of instructing and training children were manifestly from the Spirit, who divides unto all believers severally as He will. She seemed to be marked of God, as the woman to whom was to be intrusted the responsible task of superintending the education of Lydia. Mr. Mueller both expected and desired to pay for such training, and asked for the account, which in the first instance he paid, but the exact sum was returned to him anonymously; and, for the six remaining years of his daughter's stay, he could get no further bills for her schooling. Thus God provided for the board and education of this only child, not only without cost to her parents, but to their intense satisfaction as being under the true "nurture and admonition of the Lord;" for while at this school, in April,

1846, Lydia found peace in believing, and began that beautiful life in the Lord Jesus Christ, that, for forty-four years afterward, so singularly exhibited His image.

Many Christian parents have made the fatal mistake of intrusting their children's education to those whose gifts were wholly intellectual and not spiritual, and who have misled the young pupils entrusted to their care, into an irreligious or infidel life, or, at best, a career of mere intellectualism and worldly ambition. In not a few instances, all the influences of a pious home have been counteracted by the atmosphere of a school which, if not godless, has been without that fragrance of spiritual devoutness and consecration which is indispensable to the true training of impressible children during the plastic years when character is forming for eternity!

Goodness and mercy followed Mr. and Mrs. Mueller conspicuously in their sojourn in Germany in 1845, which covered about three months, from July 19th to October 11th.

God plainly led to Stuttgart, where brethren had fallen into grievous errors and needed again a helping hand. When the strong impression laid hold of Mr. Mueller, more than two months before his departure for the Continent, that he was to return there for a season, he began definitely to pray for means to go with, on May 3rd, and, within a *quarter hour* after, five hundred pounds were received, the donor specifying that the money was given for all expenses needful, "preparatory to, and attendant upon" this proposed journey. The same goodness and mercy followed all his steps while abroad. Provision was made, in God's own strange way, for suitable lodgings in Stuttgart, at a time when the city was exceptionally crowded, a wealthy retired surgeon, who had never before rented apartments, being led to offer them. All Mr. Mueller's labours were attended with blessing: during part of the time he held as many as eight meetings a week; and he was enabled to publish eleven tracts in German, and judiciously to scatter over two hundred and twenty thousand of them, as well as nearly four thousand of his Narrative, and yet evade interference from the police.

One experience of this sojourn abroad should have special mention for the lesson it suggests, both in charity for others' views and loving adaptation to circumstances. A providential opening occurred to address meetings of about one hundred and fifty members of the state church. In his view the character of such assemblies was not wholly conformed to the Scripture pattern, and hence did not altogether meet his approval; but such opportunity was afforded to bear testimony for the truth's sake, and to exhibit Christian unity upon essentials, for love's sake, that he judged it of the Lord that he should enter this open door. Those who knew Mr. Mueller but little, but knew his positive convictions and uncompromising loyalty to them, might suspect that he would have little forbearance with even minor errors, and would not bend himself from his stern attitude of inflexibility to accommodate himself to those who were ensnared by them. But those who knew him better, saw that he held fast the form of sound words with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Like Paul, ever ready to be made all things to all men that by all means he might save some, in his whole character and conduct nothing shone, more radiantly beautiful, than Love. He felt that he who would lift up others must bow himself to lay hold on them; that to help brethren we must bear with them, not insisting upon

matters of minor importance as though they were essential and fundamental. Hence his course, instead of being needlessly repellent, was tenderly conciliatory; and it was a conspicuous sign of grace that, while holding his own views of truth and duty so positively and tenaciously, the intolerance of bigotry was so displaced by the forbearance of charity that, when the Lord so led and circumstances so required, he could conform for a time to customs whose propriety he doubted, without abating either the earnestness of his conviction or the integrity of his testimony.

God's goodness and mercy were seen in the fact that, whenever more liberal things were devised for Him, He responded in providing liberally means to carry out such desires. This was abundantly illustrated not only in the orphan work, but in the history of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution; when, for years together, the various branches of this work grew so rapidly, until the point of full development was reached. The time indeed came when, in some departments, it pleased God that contraction should succeed expansion, but even here goodness ruled, for it was afterward seen that it was because *other brethren* had been led to take up such branches of the Lord's work, in all of which developments Mr. Mueller as truly rejoiced as though it had been his work alone that was honoured of God.

The aiding of brethren in the mission fields grew more and more dear to his heart, and the means to indulge his unselfish desires were so multiplied that, in 1846, he found, on reviewing the history of the Lord's dealings, that he had been enabled to expend about *seven times* as much of late years as previously. It may here be added, again by way of anticipation, that when, nineteen years later, in 1865, he sat down to apportion to such labourers in the Lord as he was wont to assist, the sums he felt it desirable to send to each, he found before him the names of *one hundred and twenty-two such!* Goodness and mercy indeed! Here was but one branch of his work, and yet to what proportions and fruitfulness it had grown! He needed four hundred and sixty-six pounds to send them to fill out his appropriations, and he lacked ninety-two of this amount. He carried the lack to the Lord, and *that evening* received five pounds, and the *next morning* a hundred more, and a further "birthday memorial" of fifty, so that he had in all thirty-seven more than he had asked.

What goodness and mercy followed him in the strength he ever had to bear the heavy loads of care incident to his work! The Lord's coach bore him and his burdens together. Day by day his gracious Master preserved his peace unbroken, though disease found its way into this large family, though fit homes and work must be found for outgoing orphans, and fit care and training for incoming orphans; though crises were constantly arising and new needs constantly recurring, grave matters daily demanded prayer and watching, and perpetual diligence and vigilance were needful; for the Lord was his Helper, and carried all his loads.

During the winter of 1846-7 there was a peculiar season of dearth. Would God's goodness and mercy fail? There were those who looked on, more than half incredulous, saying to themselves if not to others,

"I wonder how it is now with Mr. Mueller and his orphans! If he is able to provide for them now as he has been, we will say nothing." But all through this time of widespread want his witness was,

"We lack nothing: God helps us."

Faith led when the way was too dark for sight; in fact the darker the road the more was the Hand felt that leads the blind by a way they know not. *They went through that winter as easily as through any other from the beginning of the work!*

Was it no sign that God's "footmen" followed George Mueller that the work never ceased to be both a work of faith and of prayer? that no difficulties or discouragements, no successes or triumphs, ever caused for an hour a departure from the sublime essential principles on which the work was based, or a diversion from the purpose for which it had been built up?

We have heard it said of a brother, much honoured of God in beginning a work of faith, that, when it had grown to greater proportions, he seemed to change its base to that of a business scheme. How it glorifies God that the holy enterprise, planted in Bristol in 1834, has known no such alteration in its essential features during all these years. Though the work grew, and its needs with it, until the expenses were twofold, threefold, fourfold, and, at last, seventyfold what they were when that first Orphan House was opened in Wilson Street, there has been no *change of base*, never any looking to man for patronage or support, never any dependence upon a regular income or fixed endowment. God has been, all through these years, as at first, the sole Patron and Dependence. The Scriptural Knowledge Institution has not been wrecked on the rocks of financial failure, nor has it even drifted away from its original moorings in the safe anchorage-ground of the Promises of Jehovah.

Was it not goodness and mercy that kept George Mueller ever grateful as well as faithful! He did not more constantly feel his need of faith and prayer than his duty and privilege of abounding joy and praise. Some might think that, after such experiences of answered prayer, one would be less and less moved by them, as the novelty was lost in the uniformity of such interpositions. But no. When, in June, 1853, at a time of sore need, the Lord sent, in one sum, three hundred pounds, he could scarcely contain his triumphant joy in God. He walked up and down his room for a long time, his heart overflowing and his eyes too, his mouth filled with laughter and his voice with song, while he gave himself afresh to the faithful Master he served. God's blessings were to him always new and fresh. Answered prayers never lost the charm of novelty; like flowers plucked fresh every hour from the gardens of God, they never got stale, losing none of their beauty or celestial fragrance.

And what goodness and mercy was it that never suffered prayerfulness and patience to relax their hold, either when answers seemed to come fast and thick like snowflakes, or when the heavens seemed locked up and faith had to wait patiently and long! Every day brought new demands for continuance in prayer. In fact, as Mr. Mueller testifies, the only

difference between latter and former days was that the difficulties were greater in proportion as the work was larger. But he adds that this was to be expected, for the Lord gives faith for the very purpose of trying it for the glory of His own name and the good of him who has the faith, and it is by these very trials that trust learns the secret of its triumphs.

Goodness and mercy not only guided but also *guarded* this servant of God. God's footmen bore a protecting shield which was always over him. Amid thousands of unseen perils, occasionally some danger was known, though generally after it was passed. While at Keswick labouring in 1847, for example, a man, taken deranged while lodging in the same house, shot himself. It afterward transpired that he had an impression that Mr. Mueller had designs on his life, and had he met Mr. Mueller during this insane attack he would probably have shot him with the loaded pistol he carried about on his person.

The pathway of this man of God sometimes led through deep waters of affliction, but goodness and mercy still followed, and held him up. In the autumn of 1852, his beloved brother-in-law, Mr. A. N. Groves, came back from the East Indies, very ill; and in May of the next year, after a blessed witness for God, he fell asleep at Mr. Mueller's house. To him Mr. Mueller owed much through grace at the outset of his labours in 1829. By his example his faith had been stimulated and helped when, with no visible support or connection with any missionary society, Mr. Groves had gone to Bagdad with wife and children, for the sake of mission work in this far-off field, resigning a lucrative practice of about fifteen hundred pounds a year. The tie between these men was very close and tender and the loss of this brother-in-law gave keen sorrow.

In July following, Mr. and Mrs. Mueller went through a yet severer trial. Lydia, the beloved daughter and only child,-- born in 1832 and new-born in 1846, and at this time twenty years old and a treasure without price,-- was taken ill in the latter part of June, and the ailment developed into a malignant typhoid which, two weeks later, brought her to the gates of death. These parents had to face the prospect of being left childless. But faith triumphed and prayer prevailed. Their darling Lydia was spared to be, for many years to come, a blessing beyond words, not only to them and to her future husband, but to many others in a wider circle of influence. Mr. Mueller found, in this trial, a special proof of God's goodness and mercy, which he gratefully records, in the growth in grace, evidenced in his entire and joyful acquiescence in the Father's will, when, with such a loss apparently before him, his confidence was undisturbed that all things would work together for good. He could not but contrast with this experience of serenity, that broken peace and complaining spirit with which he had met a like trial in August, 1831, twenty-one years before. How, like a magnet among steel filings, the thankful heart finds the mercies and picks them out of the black dust of sorrow and suffering!

The second volume of Mr. Mueller's Narrative closes with a paragraph in which he formally disclaims as impudent presumption and pretension all high rank as a miracle-worker, and records his regret that any work, based on scriptural promises and built on the simple lines of faith and prayer, should be accounted either phenomenal or fanatical.

The common ways of accounting for its success would be absurdly ridiculous and amusing were they not so sadly unbelieving. Those who knew little or nothing, either of the exercise of faith or the experience of God's faithfulness, resorted to the most God-dishonouring explanations of the work. Some said:

"Mr. Mueller is a foreigner; his methods are so novel as to attract attention."

Others that the

"Annual Reports brought in the money,"

or suggested that he had

"a secret treasure."

His quiet reply was,

that his being a foreigner would be more likely to repel than to attract confidence;

that the novelty would scarcely avail him after more than a score of years;

that other institutions which issued reports did not always escape want and debt;

but, as to the *secret treasure* to which he was supposed to have access, he felt constrained to confess that there was *more in that supposition than the objectors were aware of*. He had indeed a Treasury, inexhaustible-- in the promises of a God unchangeably faithful-- from which he admits that he had already in 1856 drawn for twenty-two years, and in all over one hundred and thirteen thousand pounds.

As to the Reports, it may be worth while to notice that he never but once in his life advertised the public of any need, and that was the *need of more orphans*-- more to care for in the name of the Lord-- a single and singular case of advertising, by which he sought not to increase his income, but his expenditure-- not asking the public to aid him in supporting the needy, but to increase the occasion of his outlay!

So far was he from depending upon any such sources of supply as the unbelieving world might think, that it was in the drying up of all such channels that he found the opportunity of his faith and of God's power. The visible treasure was often so small that it was reduced to nothing, but the invisible Treasure was God's Riches in glory, and could be drawn from without limit. This it was to which he looked alone, and in which he felt that he had a river of supply that can never run dry.\*

\*Appendix H.

The orphan work had, to Mr. Mueller, many charms which grew on him as he entered more fully into it. While his main hope was to be the means of spiritual health to these



children, he had the joy of seeing how God used these homes for the promotion of their physical welfare also, and, in cases not a few, for the entire renovation of their weak and diseased bodies. It must be remembered that most of them owed their orphan condition to that great destroyer, Consumption. Children were often brought to the orphan houses thoroughly permeated by the poison of bad blood, with diseased tendencies, and sometimes emaciated and half-starved, having had neither proper food nor medical care.

For example, in the spring of 1855, four children from five to nine years old, and of one family, were admitted to the orphanage, all in a deplorable state from lack of both nursing and nutrition. It was a serious question whether they should be admitted at all, as such tended to turn the institution into a hospital and absorb undue care and time. But to dismiss them seemed almost inhuman, certainly *inhumane*. So, trusting in God, they were taken in and cared for with parental love. A few weeks later these children were physically unrecognizable, so rapid had been the improvement in health, and probably there were with God's blessing four graves less to be dug.

The trials incident to the moral and spiritual condition of the orphans were even greater, however, than those caused by ill health and weakness. When children proved incorrigibly bad, they were expelled, lest they should corrupt others, for the institution was not a *reformatory*, as it was not a *hospital*. In 1849, a boy, of less than eight years, had to be sent away as a confirmed liar and thief, having twice run off with the belongings of other children and gloried in his juvenile crimes. Yet the forbearance exercised even in his case was marvelously godlike, for, during over five years, he had been the subject of private admonitions and prayers and all other methods of reclamation; and, when expulsion became the last resort, he was solemnly and with prayer, before all the others, sent away from the orphan house, that if possible such course might prove a double blessing, a remedy to him and a warning to others; and even then this young practised sinner was followed, in his expulsion, by loving supplication.

Towards the end of November, 1857, it was found that a serious leak in the boiler of the heating apparatus of house No. 1 would make repairs at once necessary, and as the boilers were encased in bricks and a new boiler might be required, such repairs must consume time. Meanwhile how could three hundred children, some of them very young and tender, be kept warm? Even if gas-stoves could be temporarily set up, chimneys would be needful to carry off the impure air; and no way of heating was available during repairs, even if a hundred pounds were expended to prevent risk of cold. Again Mr. Mueller turned to the Living God, and, trusting in Him, decided to have the repairs begun. A day or so before the fires had to be put out, a bleak north wind set in. The work could no longer be delayed; yet weather, prematurely cold for the season, threatened these hundreds of children with hurtful exposure. The Lord was boldly appealed to.

"Lord, these are Thy orphans: be pleased to change this north wind into a south wind, and give the workmen a mind to work that the job may be speedily done."

The evening before the repairs actually began, the cold blast was still blowing; but *on that day a south wind blew, and the weather was so mild that no fire was needful!* Not

only so, but, as Mr. Mueller went into the cellar with the overseer of the work, to see whether the repairs could in no way be expedited, he heard him say, in the hearing of the men,

"They will work late this evening, and come very early again to-morrow."

*"We would rather, sir,"* was the reply, *"work all night."*

And so, within about thirty hours, the fire was again burning to heat the water in the boiler; and, until the apparatus was again in order, that merciful soft south wind had continued to blow. Goodness and mercy were following the Lord's humble servant, made the more conspicuous by the crises of special trial and trouble.

Every new exigency provoked new prayer and evoked new faith. Then, in 1862, several boys were ready to be apprenticed, and there were no applications such as were desired, prayer was the one resort, as advertising would tend to bring applications from masters who sought apprentices for the sake of the premium. But every one of the eighteen boys was properly bound over to a Christian master, whose business was suitable and who would receive the lad into his own family.

About the same time one of the drains was obstructed which runs about eleven feet underground. Then three holes had been dug and as many places in the drain tapped in vain, prayer was offered that in the fourth case the workmen might be guided to the very spot where the stoppage existed-- and the request was literally answered.

Three instances of marked deliverance, in answer to prayer, are specially recorded for the year between May 26, 1864, and the same date in 1865, which should not be passed by without at least a mention.

First, in the great drought of the summer of 1864, when the fifteen large cisterns in the three orphan houses were empty, and the nine deep wells, and even the good spring which had never before failed, were almost all dry. Two or three thousand gallons of water were daily required, and daily prayer was made to the God of the rain. See how God provided, while pleased to withhold the supply from above! A farmer, near by, supplied, from his larger wells, about half the water needful, the rest being furnished by the half-exhausted wells on Ashley Down; and, when he could no longer spare water, without a day's interval, another farmer offered a supply from a brook which ran through his fields, and thus there was abundance until the rains replenished cisterns and wells."\*

\*About twenty years later the Bristol Water Works Co. introduced pipes and thus a permanent and unfailing supply.

Second, when, for three years, scarlet and typhus fevers and smallpox, being prevalent in Bristol and the vicinity, threatened the orphans, prayer was again made to Him who is the God of health as well as of rain. There was no case of scarlet or typhus fever during the whole time, though smallpox was permitted to find an entrance into the smallest of the orphan houses. Prayer was still the one resort. The disease spread to the other houses,



until at one time fifteen were ill with it. The cases, however, were mercifully light, and the Lord was besought to allow the epidemic to spread *no further*. Not another child was taken; and when, after nine months, the disease altogether disappeared, not one child had died of it, and only one teacher or adult had had an attack, and that was very mild. What ravages the disease might have made among the twelve hundred inmates of these orphan houses, had it then prevailed as later, in 1872!

Third, tremendous gales visited Bristol and neighbourhood in January, 1865. The roofs of the orphan houses were so injured as to be laid open in at least twenty places, and large panes of glass were broken. The day was Saturday, and no glazier and slater could be had before Monday. So the Lord of wind and weather was besought to protect the exposed property during the interval. The wind calmed down, and the rain was restrained until midday of Wednesday, when the repairs were about furnished, but heavy rainfalls drove the slaters from the roof. One exposed opening remained and much damage threatened; but, in answer to prayer, the rain was stayed, and the work resumed. No damage had been done while the last opening was unrepaired for it had exposed the building from the *south*, while the rain came from the *north*.

Mr. Mueller records these circumstances with his usual particularity, as part of his witness to the Living God, and to the goodness and mercy that closely and continually followed him.

During the next year, 1865-6, scarlet fever broke out in the orphanage. In all thirty-nine children were ill, but Whooping-cough also made its appearance; but though, during that season, it was not only very prevalent but very malignant in Bristol, in all the three houses there were but seventeen cases, and the only fatal one was that of a little girl with constitutionally weak lungs.

During this same year, however, the Spirit of God wrought mightily among the girls, as in the previous year among the boys, so that over one hundred became deeply earnest seekers after salvation; and so, even in tribulation, consolation abounded in Christ. Mr. Mueller and his wife and helpers now implored God to deepen and broaden this work of His Spirit. Toward the end of the year closing in May, 1866, Emma Bunn, an orphan girl of seventeen, was struck with consumption. Though, for fourteen years, she had been under Mr. Mueller's care, she was, in this dangerous illness, still careless and indifferent; and, as she drew near to death, her case continued as hopeless as ever. Prayer was unceasing for her; and it pleased God suddenly to reveal Christ to her as her Saviour. Great self-loathing now at once took the place of former indifference; confession of sins of previous callousness of conscience; and unspeakable joy in the Lord, of former apathy and coldness. It was a spiritual miracle -- this girl's sudden transformation into a witness for God, manifesting deepest conviction for past sin and earnest concern for others. Her thoughtless and heedless state had been so well known that her conversion and dying messages were now the Lord's means of the *most extensive and God-glorifying work ever wrought up to that time among the orphans*. In one house alone three hundred and fifty were led to seek peace in believing.

What lessons lie hidden-- nay, lie on the very surface-- to be read of every willing observer of these events! Prayer can break even a hard heart; a memory, stored with biblical truth and pious teaching, will prove, when once God's grace softens the heart and unlooses the tongue, a source of both personal growth in grace and of capacity for wide service to others. We are all practically too careless of the training of children, and too distrustful of young converts. Mr. Mueller was more and more impressed by the triumphs of the grace of God as seen in children converted at the tender age of nine or ten and holding the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end.

These facts and experiences, gleaned, like handfuls of grain, from a wide field, show the character both of the seed sown and the harvest reaped, from the sowing.

Again, when, in 1866, cholera developed in England, in answer to special prayer *not one* case of this disease was known in the orphan houses; and when, in the autumn, whooping-cough and measles broke out, though eight children had the former and two hundred and sixty-two, the latter, not one child died, or was afterward debilitated by the attack. From May, 1866, to May, 1867, out of over thirteen hundred children under care, only eleven died, considerably less than one per cent.

That severe and epidemic disease should find its way into the orphanages at all may seem strange to those who judge God's faithfulness by appearances, but many were the compensations for such trials. By them not only were the hearts of the children often turned to God, but the hearts of helpers in the Institution were made more sympathetic and tender, and the hearts of God's people at large were stirred up to practical and systematic help. God uses such seeming calamities as "advertisements" of His work; many who would not have heard of the Institution, or on whom what they did hear would have made little impression, were led to take a deep interest in an orphanage where thousands of little ones were exposed to the ravages of some malignant and dangerous epidemic.

Looking back, in 1865, after thirty-one years, upon the work thus far done for the Lord, Mr. Mueller gratefully records that, during the entire time, he had been enabled to hold fast the original principles on which the work was based on March 5, 1834. He had never once gone into debt; he had sought for the Institution no patron but the Living God; and he had kept to the line of demarkation between believers and unbelievers, in all his seeking for active helpers in the work.

His grand purpose, in all his labours, having been, from the beginning, the glory of God, in showing what could be done through prayer and faith, without any leaning upon man, his unequivocal testimony is:

"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

Though for about five years they had, almost daily, been in the constant trial of faith, they were as constantly proving His faithfulness. The work had rapidly grown, till it assumed gigantic proportions, but so did the help of God keep pace with all the needs and

demands of its growth.

In January, 1866, Mr. Henry Craik, who had for thirty-six years been Mr. Mueller's valued friend, and, since 1832, his coworker in Bristol, fell asleep after an illness of seven months. In Devonshire these two brethren had first known each other, and the acquaintance had subsequently ripened, through years of common labour and trial, into an affection seldom found among men. They were nearly of an age, both being a little past sixty when Mr. Craik died. The loss was too heavy to have been patiently and serenely borne, had not the survivor known and felt beneath him the Everlasting Arms. And even this bereavement, which in one aspect was an irreparable loss, was seen to be only another proof of God's love. The look ahead might be a dark one, the way desolate and even dangerous, but goodness and mercy were still following very close behind, and would in every new place of danger or difficulty be at hand to help over hard places and give comfort and cheer in the night season.