

The New Birth and The New Life

The originally "authorized memoir".

BY
ARTHUR T. PIERSON

THE lost days of sin, now forever past, the days of heaven upon earth began to dawn, to grow brighter till the perfect day.

We enter the second period of this life we are reviewing. After a score of years of evil-doing George Müller was converted to God, and the radical nature of the change strikingly proves and displays the sovereignty of Almighty Grace. He had been kept amid scenes of outrageous and flagrant sin, and brought through many perils, as well as two serious illnesses, because divine purposes of mercy were to be fulfilled in him. No other explanation can adequately account for the facts.

Let those who would explain such a conversion without taking God into account remember that it was at a time when this young sinner was as careless as ever; when he had not for years read the Bible or had a copy of it in his possession; when he had seldom gone to a service of worship, and had never yet even heard one gospel sermon; when he had never been told by any believer what it is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and to live by God's help and according to His Word; when, in fact, he had no conception of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and knew not the real nature of a holy life, but thought all others to be as himself, except in the degree of depravity and iniquity. This young man had thus grown to manhood without having learned that rudimental truth that sinners and saints differ not in degree but in kind; that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; yet the hard heart of such a man, at such a time and in such conditions, was so wrought upon by the Holy Spirit that he suddenly found entrance into a new sphere of life, with new adaptations to its new atmosphere.

The divine Hand in this history is doubly plain when, as we now look back, we see that this was also the period of preparation for his life-work-- a preparation the more mysterious because he had as yet no conception or forecast of that work. During the next ten years we shall watch the divine Potter, to Whom George Müller was a chosen vessel for service, moulding and fitting the vessel for His use. Every step is one of preparation, but can be understood only in the light which that future casts backward over the unique ministry to the church and the world, to which this new convert was all unconsciously separated by God and was to become so peculiarly consecrated.

One Saturday afternoon about the middle of November, 1825, Beta said to

Müller, as they were returning from a walk, that he was going that evening to a meeting at a believer's house, where he was wont to go on Saturdays, and where a few friends met to sing, to pray, and to read the word of God and a printed sermon. Such a programme held out nothing fitted to draw a man of the world who sought his daily gratifications at the card-table and in the wine-cup, the dance and the drama, and whose companionships were found in dissipated young fellows: and yet George Müller felt at once a wish to go to this meeting, though he could not have told why. There was no doubt a conscious void within him never yet filled, and some instinctive inner voice whispered that he might there find food for his soul-hunger-- a, satisfying something after which he had all his life been unconsciously and blindly groping. He expressed the desire to go, which his friend hesitated to encourage lest such a gay and reckless devotee of vicious pleasures might feel ill at ease in such an assembly. However, he called for young Müller and took him to the meeting.

During his wanderings as a backslider, Beta had both joined and aided George Müller in his evil courses, but, on coming back from the Swiss tour, his sense of sin had so revived as to constrain him to make a full confession to his father; and, through a Christian friend, one Dr. Richter, a former student at Halle, he had been made acquainted with the Mr. Wagner at whose dwelling the meetings were held. The two young men therefore went together, and the former backslider was used of God to "convert a sinner from the error of his way and save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins."

That Saturday evening was the turning-point in George Müller's history and destiny. He found himself in strange company, amid novel surroundings, and breathing a new atmosphere. His awkwardness made him feel so uncertain of his welcome that he made some apology for being there. But he never forgot brother Wagner's gracious answer: "Come as often as you please! house and heart are open to you." He little knew then what he afterward learned from blessed experience, what joy fills and thrills the hearts of praying saints when an evil-doer turns his feet, however timidly, toward a place of prayer!

All present sat down and sang a hymn. Then a brother-- who afterward went to Africa under the London Missionary Society-- fell on his knees and prayed for God's blessing on the meeting. That *kneeling before God in prayer* made upon Müller an impression never lost. He was in his twenty-first year, and yet he had *never before seen any one on his knees praying*, and of course had never himself knelt before God,-- the Prussian habit being to stand in public prayer.

A chapter was read from the word of God, and-- all meetings where the Scriptures were expounded, unless by an ordained clergyman, being under the ban as irregular-- a printed sermon was read. When, after another hymn, the master of the house prayed, George Müller was inwardly saying: "I am much more learned than this illiterate man, but I could not pray as well as he." Strange to say, a new joy was already springing up in his soul for which he could have

given as little explanation as for his unaccountable desire to go to that meeting. But so it was; and on the way home he could not forbear saying to Beta: "All we saw on our journey to Switzerland, and all our former pleasures, are as nothing compared to this evening."

Whether or not, on reaching his own room, he himself knelt to pray he could not recall, but he never forgot that a new and strange peace and rest somehow found him as he lay in bed that night. Was it God's wings that folded over him, after all his vain flight away from the true nest where the divine Eagle flutters over His young?

How sovereign are God's ways of working! In such a sinner as Müller, theologians would have demanded a great "law work" as the necessary doorway to a new life. Yet there was at this time as little deep conviction of guilt and condemnation as there was deep knowledge of God and of divine things, and perhaps it was because there was so little of the latter that there was so little of the former.

Our rigid theories of conversion all fail in view of such facts. We have heard of a little child who so simply trusted Christ for salvation that she could give no account of any "law work." And as one of the old examiners, who, thought there could be no genuine conversion without a period of deep conviction, asked her, "But, my dear, how about the Slough of Despond?" She dropped a courtesy and said, "*Please, sir, I didn't come that way!*"

George Müller's eyes were but half opened, as though he saw men as trees walking; but Christ had touched those eyes. He knew little of the great Healer, but somehow he had touched the hem of His garment of grace, and virtue came out of Him who wears that seamless robe, and who responds even to the faintest contact of the soul that is groping after salvation. And so we meet here another proof of the infinite variety of God's working which, like the fact of that working, is so wonderful. That Saturday evening in November, 1825, was to this young student of Halle *the parting of the ways*. He had tasted that the Lord is gracious, though he himself could not account for the new relish for divine things which made it seem too long to wait a week for another meal; so that thrice before the Saturday following he sought the house of brother Wagner, there, with the help of brethren, to search the Scriptures.

We should lose one of the main lessons of this life-story by passing too hastily over such an event as this conversion and the exact manner of it, for here is to be found the first great step in God's preparation of the workman for his work.

Nothing is more wonderful in history than the unmistakable signs and proofs of *preadaptation*. Our life-occurrences are not *disjecta membra*-- scattered, disconnected, and accidental fragments. In God's book all these events were written beforehand, when as yet there was nothing in existence but the plan in

God's mind-- to be fashioned in continuance in actual history-- as is perhaps suggested in Psalm cxxxix.16 (margin).

We see stones and timbers brought to a building site-- the stones from different quarries and the timbers from various shops-- and different workmen have been busy upon them at times and places which forbade all conscious contact or cooperation. The conditions oppose all preconcerted action, and yet, without chipping or cutting, stone fits stone, and timber fits timber-- tenons and mortises, and proportions and dimensions, all corresponding so that when the building is complete it is as perfectly proportioned and as accurately fitted as though it had been all prepared in one workshop and put together in advance as a test. In such circumstances no sane man would doubt that *one presiding mind*-- one architect and master builder -- had planned that structure, however many were the quarries and workshops and labourers.

And so it is with this life-story we are writing. The materials to be built into one structure of service were from a thousand sources and moulded into form by many hands, but there was a mutual fitness and a common adaptation to the end in view which prove that He whose mind and plan span the ages had a supreme purpose to which all human agents were unconsciously tributary. The awe of this vision of God's workmanship will grow upon us as we look beneath and behind the mere human occurrences to see the divine Hand shaping and building together all these seemingly disconnected events and experiences into one life-work.

For example, what have we found to be the initial step and stage in George Müller's spiritual history? In a little gathering of believers, where for the first time he saw a child of God pray on his knees, he found his first approach to a pardoning God. Let us observe:

this man was henceforth to be singularly and peculiarly identified with simple scriptural assemblies of believers after the most primitive and apostolic pattern--

meetings for prayer and praise, reading and expounding of the Word, such as doubtless were held at the house of Mary the mother of John Mark--

assemblies mainly and primarily for believers held wherever a place could be found, with no stress laid on consecrated buildings and with absolutely no secular or aesthetic attractions.

Such assemblies were to be so linked with the whole life, work, and witness of George Müller as to be inseparable from his name, and it was in such an assembly that the night before he died he gave out his last hymn and offered his last prayer.

Not only so, but *prayer, on the knees; both in secret and in such companion of*

believers, was henceforth to be the one great central secret of his holy living and holy serving. Upon this *corner-stone* of prayer all his life-work was to be built. Of Sir Henry Lawrence the native soldiers during the Lucknow mutiny were wont to say that, "when he looked twice up to heaven, once down to earth, and then stroked his beard, he knew what to do." And of George Müller it may well be said that he was to be, for more than seventy years, the man who conspicuously looked up to heaven to learn what he was to do. Prayer for direct divine guidance in every crisis, great or small, was to be the secret of his whole career. Is there any accident in the exact way in which he was first led to God, and in the precise character of the scenes which were thus stamped with such lasting interest and importance? The thought of a divine plan which is thus emphasized at this point we are to see singularly illustrated as we mark how stone after stone and timber after timber are brought to the building site, and all so mutually fitted that no sound of any human tool is to be heard while the life-work is in building.

Of course a man that had been so profligate and prodigal must at least begin at conversion to live a changed life. Not that all at once the old habits were abandoned, for each total transformation demands deeper knowledge of the word and will of God than George Müller yet had. But within him a new separating and sanctifying Power was at work. There was a distaste for wicked joys and former companions; the frequenting of taverns entirely ceased, and a lying tongue felt new and strange bands about it. A watch was set at the door of the lips, and every word that went forth was liable to a challenge, so that old habits of untamed speech were arrested and corrected.

At this time he was translating into German for the press a French novel, hoping to use the proceeds of his work for a visit to Paris, etc. At first the plan for the pleasure-trip was abandoned, then the question arose whether the work itself should not be. Whether his convictions were not clear or his moral courage not sufficient, he went on with the novel. It was finished, but never published. Providential hindrances prevented or delayed the sale and publication of the manuscript until clearer spiritual vision showed him that the whole matter was not of faith and was therefore sin, so that he would neither sell nor print the novel, but burned it-- another significant step, for it was his *first courageous act of self-denial in surrender to the voice of the Spirit*-- and another stone or timber was thus ready for the coming building.

He now began in different directions a good fight against evil. Though as yet weak and often vanquished before temptation, he did not habitually "continue in sin" nor offend against God without godly sorrow. Open sins became less frequent and secret sins less ensnaring. He read the word of God, prayed often, loved fellow disciples, sought church assemblies from right motives, and boldly took his stand on the side of his new Master, at the cost of reproach and ridicule from his fellow students.

George Müller's next marked step in his new path was *the discovery of the*

preciousness of the word of God.

At first he had a mere hint of the deep mines of wealth which he afterward explored. But his whole life-history so circles about certain great texts that whenever they come into this narrative they should appear in capitals to mark their prominence. And, of them all, that "little gospel" in John iii. 16 is the first, for by it he found a full salvation:

"GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD,
THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON,
THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM
SHOULD NOT PERISH,
BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE."

From these words he got his first glimpse of the philosophy of the plan of salvation-- why and how the Lord Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree as our vicarious Substitute and suffering Surety, and how His sufferings in Gethsemane and Golgotha made it forever needless that the penitent believing sinner should bear his own iniquity and die for it.

Truly to grasp this fact is the beginning of a true and saving faith-- what the Spirit calls "laying hold." He who believes and knows that God so loved him first, finds himself loving God in return, and faith works by love to purify the heart, transform the life, and overcome the world.

It was so with George Müller. He found in the word of God one great fact: the love of God in Christ. Upon that fact faith, not feeling, laid hold; and then the feeling came naturally without being waited for or sought after. The love of God in Christ constrained him to a love-- infinitely unworthy, indeed, of that to which it responded, yet supplying a new impulse unknown before. What all his father's injunctions, chastisements, entreaties, with all the urgent dictates of his own conscience, motives of expediency, and repeated resolves of amendment, utterly failed to effect, the love of God both impelled and enabled him to do-- renounce a life of sinful self-indulgence. Thus early he learned that double truth, which he afterwards passionately loved to teach others, that in the blood of God's atoning Lamb is the Fountain of both forgiveness and cleansing. Whether we seek pardon for sin or power over sin, the sole source and secret are in Christ's work for us.

The new year 1826 was indeed a *new year* to this newborn soul. He began to read missionary journals, which kindled a new flame in his heart. He felt a yearning-- not very intelligent as yet-- to be himself a messenger to the nations, and frequent praying deepened and confirmed the impression. As his knowledge of the world-field enlarged, new facts as to the destitution and the desolation of heathen peoples became as fuel to feed this flame of the mission spirit.

A carnal attachment, however, for a time almost quenched this fire of God within. He was drawn to a young woman of like age, a professed believer, whom he had met at the Saturday-evening meetings; but he had reason to think that her parents would not give her up to a missionary life, and he began, half-unconsciously, to weigh in the balance his yearning for service over against his passion for a fellow creature. Inclination, alas, out-weighed duty. Prayer lost its power and for the time was almost discontinued, with corresponding decline in joy. His heart was turned from the foreign field, and in fact from all self-denying service. Six weeks passed in this state of spiritual declension, when God took a strange way to reclaim the backslider.

A young brother, Hermann Ball, wealthy, cultured, and with every promising prospect for this world to attract him, made a great self-sacrifice. He chose Poland as a field, and work among the Jews as his mission, refusing to stay at home to rest in the soft nest of self-indulgent and luxurious ease. This choice made on young Müller a deep impression. He was compelled to contrast with it his own course. For the sake of a passionate love for a young woman he had given up the work to which he felt drawn of God, and had become both joyless and prayerless: another young man, with far more to draw him worldward, had, for the sake of a self-denying service among despised Polish Jews, resigned all the pleasures and treasures of the world. Hermann Ball was acting and choosing as Moses did in the crisis of his history, while he, George Müller, was acting and choosing more like that profane person Esau, when for one morsel of meat he bartered his birthright. The result was a new renunciation-- he gave up the girl he loved, and forsook a connection which had been formed without faith and prayer and had proved a source of alienation from God.

Here we mark another new and significant step in preparation for his life-work-- a decided step forward, which became a pattern for his after-life. For the second time *a decision for God had cost him marked self-denial*. Before, he had burned his novel; now, on the same altar, he gave up to the consuming fire a human passion which had over him an unhallowed influence. According to the measure of his light thus far, George Müller was fully, unreservedly given up to God, and therefore walking in the light. He did not have to wait long for the recompense of the reward, for the smile of God repaid him for the loss of a human love, and the peace of God was his because the God of peace was with him.

Every new spring of inward joy demands a channel for outflow, and so he felt impelled to hear witness. He wrote to his father and brother of his own happy experience, begging them to seek and find a like rest in God, thinking that they had but to know the path that leads to such joy to be equally eager to enter it. But an angry response was all the reply that his letter evoked.

About the same time the famous Dr. Tholuck took the chair of professor of divinity at Halle, and the advent of such a godly man to the faculty drew pious students from other schools of learning, and so enlarged George Müller's circle of

fellow believers, who helped him much through grace. Of course the missionary spirit revived, and with such increased fervor, that he sought his father's permission to connect himself with some missionary institution in Germany. His father was not only much displeased, but greatly disappointed, and dealt in reproaches very hard to bear. He reminded George of all the money he had spent on his education in the expectation that he would repay him by getting such a "living" as would insure to the parent a comfortable home and support for his old age; and in a fit of rage he exclaimed that he would no longer look on him as a son.

Then, seeing that son unmoved in his quiet steadfastness, he changed tone, and from threats turned to tears of entreaty that were much harder to resist than reproaches. The result of the interview was a *third* significant step in preparation for his son's life's mission. His resolve was unbroken to follow the Lord's leading at any cost, but he now clearly saw that he could be *independent of man only by being more entirely dependent on God, and that henceforth he should take no more money from his father*. To receive such support implied obedience to his wishes, for it seemed plainly wrong to look to him for the cost of his training when he had no prospect nor intention of meeting his known expectations. If he was to live on his father's money, he was under a tacit obligation to carry out his plans and seek a good living as a clergyman at home. Thus early in life George Müller learned the valuable lesson that one must preserve his independence if he would not endanger his integrity.

God was leading His servant in his youth to cast himself upon Him for temporal supplies. This step was not taken without cost, for the two years yet to be spent at the university would require more outlay than during any time previous. But thus early also did he find God a faithful Provider and Friend in need. Shortly after, certain American gentlemen, three of whom were college professors,* being in Halle and wishing instruction in German, were by Dr. Tholuck recommended to employ George Müller as tutor; and the pay was so ample for the lessons taught them and the lectures written out for them, that all wants were more than met. Thus also in his early life was written large in the chambers of his memory another golden text from the word of God:

"O FEAR THE LORD, YE HIS SAINTS!
FOR THERE IS NO WANT TO THEM THAT FEAR HIM."
(Psalm xxxiv. 9.)

* One of them, the Rev. Charles Hodge, afterward so well known as professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, etc.