

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

The originally "authorized memoir".

BY
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God's Witness To The Work

THE eleventh chapter of Hebrews-- that "Westminster Abbey" where Old Testament saints have a memorial before God-- gives a hint of a peculiar reward which faith enjoys, even in this life, as an earnest and foretaste of its final recompense.

By faith

"the elders obtained a good report,"

that is, *they had witness borne to them* by God in return for witness borne to Him. All the marked examples of faith here recorded show this twofold testimony. Abel testified to his faith in God's Atoning Lamb, and God testified to his gifts. Enoch witnessed to the unseen God by his holy walk with Him, and He testified to Enoch, by his translation, and even before it, that he pleased God. Noah's faith bore witness to God's word, by building the ark and preaching righteousness, and God bore witness to him by bringing a flood upon a world of the ungodly and saving him and his family in the ark.

George Mueller's life was one long witness to the prayer-hearing God; and, throughout, God bore him witness that his prayers were heard and his work accepted. The pages of his journal are full of striking examples of this witness-- the earnest or foretaste of the fuller recompense of reward reserved for the Lord's coming.

Compensations for renunciations, and rewards for service, do not all wait for the judgment-seat of Christ, but, as some men's sins are "open beforehand," going before to judgment, so the seed sown for God yields a harvest that is open beforehand to joyful recognition. Divine love graciously and richly acknowledged these many years of self-forgetful devotion to Him and His needy ones, by large and unexpected tokens of blessing. Toils and trials, tears and prayers, were not in vain even this side of the Hereafter.

For illustrations of this we naturally turn first of all to the orphan work. Ten thousand motherless and fatherless children had found a home and tender parental care in the

institution founded by George Mueller, and were there fed, clad, and taught, before he was called up higher. His efforts to improve their state physically, morally, and spiritually were so manifestly owned of God that he felt his compensation to be both constant and abundant, and his journal, from time to time, glows with his fervent thanksgivings.

This orphan work would amply repay all its cost during two thirds of a century, should only its *temporal benefits* be reckoned. Experience proved that, with God's blessing, one half of the lives sacrificed among the children of poverty would be saved by better conditions of body-- such as regularity and cleanliness of habits, good food, pure air, proper clothing, and wholesome exercise. At least two thirds, if not three fourths, of the parents whose offspring have found a shelter on Ashley Down had died of consumption and kindred diseases; and hence the children had been largely tainted with a like tendency. And yet, all through the history of this orphan work, there has been such care of proper sanitary conditions that there has been singular freedom from all sorts of ailments, and especially epidemic diseases; and when scarlet fever, measles, and such diseases have found entrance, the cases of sickness have been comparatively few and mild, and the usual percentage of deaths exceedingly small.

This is not the only department of training in which the recompense has been abundant. Ignorance is everywhere the usual handmaid of poverty, and there has been very careful effort to secure proper *mental* culture. With what success the education of these orphans has been looked after will sufficiently appear from the reports of the school inspector. From year to year these pupils have been examined in reading, writing, arithmetic, Scripture, dictation, geography, history, grammar, composition, and singing; and Mr. Horne reported in 1885 an average per cent of all marks as high as 91.1, and even this was surpassed the next year when it was 94, and, two years later, when it was 96.1.

But in the moral and spiritual welfare of these orphans which has been primarily sought, the richest recompense has been enjoyed. The one main aim of Mr. Mueller and his whole staff of helpers, from first to last, has been to save these children-- to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The hindrances were many and formidable. If the hereditary taint of disease is to be dreaded, what of the awful legacy of sin and crime! Many of these little ones had no proper bringing up till they entered the orphan houses; and not a few had been trained indeed, but only in Satan's schools of drink and lust. And yet, notwithstanding all these drawbacks, Mr. Mueller records, with devout thankfulness, that

"the Lord had constrained them, on the whole, to behave exceedingly well, so much so as to attract the attention of observers."

Better still, large numbers have, throughout the whole history of this work, given signs of a really regenerate state, and have afterwards maintained a consistent character and conduct, and in some cases have borne singular witness to the grace of God, both by their complete transformation and by their influence for good.

In August, 1858, an orphan girl, Martha Pinnell, who had been for over twelve years

under Mr. Mueller's care, and for more than five years ill with consumption, fell asleep in Jesus. Before her death, she had, for two and a half years, known the Lord, and the change in her character and conduct had been remarkable. From an exceedingly disobedient and troublesome child with a pernicious influence, she had become both very docile and humble and most influential for good. In her unregenerate days she had declared that, if she should ever be converted, she would be "a thorough Christian," and so it proved, her happiness in God, her study of His word, her deep knowledge of the Lord Jesus, her earnest passion for souls, seemed almost incredible in one so young and so recently turned to God. And Mr. Mueller has preserved in the pages of his Journal four of the precious letters written by her to other inmates of the orphan houses.*

*Narrative, III. 258-267.

At times, and frequently, extensive revivals have been known among them when scores and hundreds have found the Lord. The year ending May 26, 1858 was especially notable for the unprecedented greatness and rapidity of the work which the Spirit of God had wrought, in such conversions. Within a few days and without any special apparent cause except the very peaceful death of a Christian orphan, Caroline Bailey, more than fifty of the one hundred and forty girls in Orphan House No. 1 were under conviction of sin, and the work spread into the other departments, till about sixty were shortly exercising faith. In July, 1859, again, in a school of one hundred and twenty girls more than half brought under deep spiritual concern; and, after a year had passed, shewed the grace of continuance in a new life. In January and February, 1860, another mighty wave of Holy Spirit power swept over the institution. It began among little girls from six to nine years old, then extended to the older girls, and then to the boys, until, inside of ten days, above two hundred were inquiring and in many instances found immediate peace. The young converts at once asked to hold prayer meetings among themselves, and were permitted; and not only so, but many began to labour and pray for others, and, out of the seven hundred orphans then in charge, some two hundred and sixty were shortly regarded as either converted or in a most hopeful state.

Again, in 1872, on the first day of the week of prayer, the Holy Spirit so moved that, without any unusual occasion for deep seriousness, hundreds were, during that season hopefully converted. Constant prayer for their souls made the orphan homes a hallowed place, and by August 1st, it was believed, after careful investigation, that seven hundred and twenty-nine might be safely counted as being disciples of Christ, the number of believing orphans being thus far in excess of any previous period. A series of such blessings have, down to this date, crowned the sincere endeavours of all who have charge of these children, to lead them to seek

"first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness."

By far the majority of orphans sent out for service or apprenticeship, had for some time before known the Lord; and even of those who left the Institution unconverted, the after-history of many showed that the training there received had made impossible continuance in a life of sin.

Thus, precious harvests of this seed-sowing, gathered in subsequent years, have shown that God was not unrighteous to forget this work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope.

In April, 1874, a letter from a former inmate of the orphanage enclosed a thank offering for the excellent Bible teaching there received which had borne fruit years after. So carefully had she been instructed in the way of salvation that, while yet herself unrenewed, she had been God's instrument of leading to Christ a fellow servant who had long been seeking peace, and so, became like a sign-board on the road, the means of directing another to the true path, by simply telling her what she had been taught, though not then following the path herself.

Another orphan wrote, in 1876, that often, when tempted to indulge the sin of unbelief, the thought of that six years' sojourn in Ashley Down came across the mind like a gleam of sunshine. It was remembered how the clothes there worn, the food eaten, the bed slept on, and the very walls around, were the visible answers to believing prayer, and the recollection of all these things proved a potent prescription and remedy for the doubts and waverings of the child of God, a shield against the fiery darts of satanic suggestion.

During the thirty years between 1865 and 1895, two thousand five hundred and sixty-six orphans were known to have left the institution as believers, an average of eighty-five every year; and, at the close of this thirty years, nearly six hundred were yet in the homes on Ashley Down who had given credible evidence of a regenerate state.

Mr. Mueller was permitted to know that not only had these orphans been blessed in health, educated in mind, converted to God, and made useful Christian citizens, but many of them had become fathers or mothers of Christian households. One representative instance may be cited. A man and a woman who had formerly been among these orphans became husband and wife, and they have had eight children, all earnest disciples, one of whom went as a foreign missionary to Africa.

From the first, God set His seal upon this religious training in the orphan houses. The *first two children* received into No. 1 both became true believers and zealous workers: one, a Congregational deacon, who, in a benighted neighbourhood, acted the part of a lay preacher; and the other, a laborious and successful clergyman in the Church of England, and both largely used of God in soul-winning. Could the full history be written of who have gone forth from these orphan homes, what volume of testimony would be furnished, since these are but a few scattered examples of the conspicuously useful service to which God has called those whose after-career can be traced!

In his long and extensive missionary tours, Mr. Mueller was permitted to see, gather, and partake of many widely scattered fruits of his work on Ashley Down. While preaching in Brooklyn, N. Y., in September, 1877, he learned that in Philadelphia a legacy of a thousand pounds was waiting for him, the proceeds of a life-insurance which the testator had willed to the work, and in city after city he had the joy of meeting scores of orphans brought up under his care.

He minutely records the remarkable usefulness of a Mr. Wilkinson, who, up to the age of fourteen and a half years had been taught at the orphanage. Twenty years had elapsed since Mr. Mueller had seen him, when, in 1878, he met him in Calvary Church, San Francisco, six thousand five hundred miles from Bristol. He found him holding fast his faith in the Lord Jesus, a happy and consistent Christian. He further heard most inspiring accounts of this man's singular service during the Civil War in America. Being on the gunboat Louisiana, he had there been the leading spirit and recognized head of a little Bethel church among his fellow seamen, who were by him led to engage in the service of Christ as to exhibit a devotion that, without a trace of fanatical enthusiasm, was full of holy zeal and joy. Their whole conversation was of God. It further transpired that, months previous, when the cloud of impending battle overhung the ship's company, he and one of his comrades had met for prayer in the "chain-locker"; and thus began a series of most remarkable meetings which, without one night's interruption, lasted for some twenty months. Wilkinson alone among the whole company had any previous knowledge of the word of God, and he became not only the leader of the movement, but the chief interpreter of the Scriptures as they met to read the book of God and exchange views upon it. Nor was he satisfied to do thus much with his comrades daily, but at another stated hour he, with some chosen helpers, gathered the coloured sailors of the ship to teach them reading, writing, etc.

A member of the Christian Commission, Mr. J. R. Hammond, who gave these facts publicity, and who was intimately acquainted with Mr. Wilkinson and his work on shipboard, said that he seemed to be a direct

"product of Mr. Mueller's faith, his calm confidence in God, the method in his whole manner of life, the persistence of purpose, and the quiet spiritual power,"

which so characterized the founder of the Bristol orphanage, being eminently reproduced in this young man who had been trained under his influence. When in a sail-loft ashore, he was compelled for two weeks to listen to the lewd and profane talk of two associates detailed with him for a certain work. For the most part he took refuge in silence; but his manner of conduct, and one sentence which dropped from his lips, brought both those rough and wicked sailors to the Saviour he loved, one of whom in three months read the word of God from Genesis to Revelation.

Mr. Mueller went nowhere without meeting converted orphans or hearing of their work, even in the far-corners of the earth. Sometimes in great cities ten or fifteen would be waiting at the close of an address to shake the hand of their "father," and tell him of their debt of gratitude and love. He found them in every conceivable sphere of service, many of them having strong holds in which the principles taught in the orphan house were dominant, and engaged in the learned professions as well as humbler walks of life.

God gave His servant also the sweet compensation seeing great blessing attending the day-schools supported by the Scriptural Knowledge Institution.

The master of the school at Clayhidon, for instance, wrote of a poor lad, a pupil in the day-school, prostrate with rheumatic fever, in a wretched home and surrounded by bitter opposers of the truth. Wasted to a skeleton, and in deep anxiety about his own soul, he was pointed to Him who says,

"Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

While yet this conversation was going on, as though suddenly he had entered into a new world, this emaciated boy began to repeat texts such as

"Suffer the little children to come unto me,"

and burst out singing:

"Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so."

He seemed transported with ecstasy, and recited text after text and hymn after hymn, learned at that school. No marvel is it if that schoolmaster felt a joy, akin to the angels, in this one proof that his labour in the Lord was not in vain. Such examples might be indefinitely multiplied, but this handful of first-fruits of a harvest may indicate the character of the whole crop.

Letters were constantly received from missionary labourers in various parts of the world who were helped by the gifts of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution. The testimony from this source alone would fill a good-sized volume, and therefore its incorporation into this memoir would be impracticable. Those who would see what grand encouragement came to Mr. Mueller from fields of labour where he was only represented by others, whom his gifts aided, should read the annual reports. A few examples may be given of the blessed results of such wide scattering of the seed of the kingdom, as specimens of thousands.

Mr. Albert Fenn, who was labouring in Madrid, wrote of a civil guard who, because of his bold witness for Christ and renunciation of the Romish confessional, was sent from place to place and most cruelly treated, and threatened with banishment to a penal settlement. Again he writes of a convert from Rome who, for trying to establish a small meeting, was summoned before the governor.

"Who pays you for this? "

"No one."

"What do you gain by it?"

"Nothing."

"How do you live?"

"I work with my hands in a mine."

"Why do you hold meetings?"

"Because God has blessed my soul, and I wish others to be blessed."

"You? you were made a miserable day-labourer; I prohibit the meetings."

"I yield to force," was the calm reply, "but as long as I have a mouth to speak I shall speak for Christ."

How like those primitive disciples who boldly faced the rulers at Jerusalem, and, being forbidden to speak in Jesus' name, firmly answered:

"We ought to obey God rather than man
whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you
more than unto God judge ye:
for we cannot but speak the things
which we have seen and heard."

A missionary labourer writes from India, of three Brahman priests and scores of Santhals and Hindus, sitting down with four Europeans to keep the supper of the Lord-- all fruits of his ministry. Within a twelvemonth, sixty-two men and women, including head men of villages; four Brahman women, wives of priests and of head men, were baptized, representing twenty-three villages in which the gospel had been preached. At one time more than one hundred persons were awakened in one mission in Spain; and such harvests as these were not infrequent in various fields to which the founder of the orphan work had the joy of sending aid.

In 1885, a scholar of one of the schools at Carrara, Italy, was confronted by a priest.

"In the Bible," said he, "you do not find the commandments of the church."

"No, sir," said the child, "for it is not for the church of God to *command*, but to *obey*."

"Tell me, then," said the priest, "these commandments of God,"

"Yes, sir," replied child;

"I am the Lord thy God.
Thou shalt have no other God before me.
Neither shalt thou make any graven image."

"Stop! stop!" cried the priest, "I do not understand it so."

"But so," quietly replied the child, "it is written in God's word."

This simple incident may illustrate both the character of the teaching given in the schools, and the character often developed in those who were taught.

Out of the many pages of Mr. Mueller's journal, probably about one-fifth are occupied wholly with extracts from letters like these from missionaries, teachers, and helpers which kept him informed of the progress of the Lord's work at home and in many lands where the labourers were by him enabled to continue their service. Bible-carriages, open-air services, Christian schools, tract distribution, and various other forms of holy labour for the benighted souls near and far, formed part of the many-branching tree of life that was planted on Ashley Down.

Another of the main encouragements and rewards which Mr. Mueller enjoyed in this life was the knowledge that his example had emboldened other believers to attempt like work for God, on like principles. This he himself regarded as the greatest blessing resulting from his life-work, that hundreds of thousands of children of God had been led in various parts of the world to trust in God in all simplicity; and when such trust found expression in similar service to orphans, it seemed the consummation of his hopes, for the work was thus proven to have its seed in itself after its kind, a self-propagating life, which doubly demonstrated it to be a tree of the Lord's own planting, that He might be glorified.

In December, 1876, Mr. Mueller learned, for instance, that a Christian evangelist, simply through reading about the orphan work in Bristol, had it laid on his heart to care about orphans, and encouraged by Mr. Mueller's example, solely in dependence on the Lord, had begun in 1863 with three orphans at Nimwegen in Holland, and had at that date, only fourteen years after, over four hundred and fifty in the institution. It pleased the Lord that he and Mrs. Mueller should, with their own eyes, see this institution, and he says that in "almost numberless instances" the Lord permitted him to know of similar fruits of his work.

At his first visit to Tokyo, Japan, he gave an account of it, and as the result, Mr. Ishii, a native Christian Japanese, started an orphanage upon a similar basis of prayer, faith, and dependence upon the Living God, and at Mr. Mueller's second visit to the Island Empire he found this orphan work prosperously in progress.

How generally fruitful the example thus furnished on Ashley Down has been in good to the church and the work will never be known on earth. A man living at Horfield, in sight of the orphan buildings, has said that, whenever he felt doubts of the Living God creeping into his mind, he used to get up and look through the night at the many windows lit up on Ashley Down, and they gleamed out through the darkness as stars in the sky.

It was the witness of Mr. Mueller to a prayer-hearing God which encouraged Rev. J. Hudson Taylor in 1863, thirty years after Mr. Mueller's great step was taken, to venture

wholly on the Lord, in founding the China Inland Mission. It has been said that to the example of A. H. Francké, in Halle, or George Mueller in Bristol, may be more or less directly traced every form of "faith work," prevalent since.

The Scriptural Knowledge Institution was made in all its departments a means of blessing. Already in the year ending May 26, 1860, a hundred servants of Christ had been more or less aided, and far more souls had been hopefully brought to God through their labours than during any year previous. About six hundred letters, received from them, had cheered Mr. Mueller's heart during twelvemonth, and this source of joy overflowed during all his life. In countless cases children of God were lifted to a higher level of faith and life, and unconverted souls were turned to God through the witness borne to God by the institutions on Ashley Down. Mr. Mueller has summed up this long history of blessing by two statements which are worth pondering.

First, that the Lord, was pleased to give him far beyond all he at first expected to accomplish or receive;

And secondly, that he was fully persuaded that all he had seen and known would not equal the thousandth part of what he should see and know when The Lord should come, His reward with Him, to give every man according that his work shall be.

The *circulation of Mr. Mueller's Narrative* was a most conspicuous means of untold good.

In November, 1856, Mr. James McQuilkin, a young Irishman, was converted, and early in the next year, read the first two volumes of that Narrative. He said to himself:

"Mr. Mueller obtains all this simply by prayer; so may I be blessed by the same means,"

and he began to pray. First of all he received from the Lord, in answer, a spiritual companion, and then two more of like mind; and they four began stated seasons of prayer in a small schoolhouse near Kells, Antrim, Ireland, every Friday evening. On the first day of the new year, 1858, a farm-servant was remarkably brought to the Lord in answer to their prayers, and these five gave themselves anew to united supplication. Shortly a sixth young man was added to their number by conversion, and so the little company of praying souls slowly grew, only believers being admitted to these simple meetings for fellowship in reading of the Scriptures, prayer, and mutual exhortation.

About Christmas, that year, Mr. McQuilkin, with the two brethren who had first joined him-- one of whom was Mr. Jeremiah Meneely, who is still at work for God-- held meeting by request at Ahoghill. Some believed and some mocked, while others thought these three converts presumptuous; but two weeks later another meeting was held, at which God's Spirit began to work most mightily and conversions now rapidly multiplied. Some converts bore the sacred coals and kindled the fire elsewhere, and in many places revival flames began to burn; and in Ballymena, Belfast, and at other points the Spirit's gracious work was manifest.

Such was the starting-point, in fact, of one of the most widespread and memorable revivals ever known in our century, and which spread the next year in England, Wales, and Scotland. Thousands found Christ, and walked in newness of life; and the results are still manifest after more than forty years.

As early as 1868 it was found that one who had thankfully read this Narrative had issued a compendium of it in Swedish. We have seen how widely useful it has been in Germany; and in many other languages its substance at least has been made available to native readers.

Knowledge came to Mr. Mueller of a boy of ten years who got hold of one of these Reports, and, although belonging to a family of unbelievers, began to pray:

"God, teach me to pray like George Mueller, and hear me as Thou dost hear George Mueller."

He further declared his wish to be a preacher, which his widowed mother very strongly opposed, objecting that the boy did not know enough to get into the grammar-school, which is the first step towards such a high calling. The lad, however, rejoined:

"I learn and pray, and God will help me through as He has done George Mueller."

And soon, to the surprise of everybody, the boy had successfully passed his examination and was received at the school.

A donor writes, September 20, 1879, that the reading of the Narrative totally changed his inner life to one of perfect trust and confidence in God. It led to the devoting of at least a tenth of his earnings to the Lord's purposes, and showed him how much more blessed it is to give than to receive; and it led him also to place a copy of that Narrative on the shelves of a Town Institute library where three thousand members and subscribers might have access to it.

Another donor suggests that it might be well if Prof. Huxley and his sympathizers, who had been proposing some new arbitrary "prayer-gauge," would, instead of treating prayer as so much waste of breath, try how long they could keep five orphan houses running, with over two thousand orphans, and without asking any one for help,-- either "GOD or MAN."

In September, 1882, another donor describes himself as

"simply astounded at the blessed results of prayer and faith,"

and many others have found this brief narrative

"the most wonderful and complete refutation of skepticism it had ever been their lot to meet with"--

an array of facts constituting the most undeniable

"evidences of Christianity."

There are abundant instances of the power exerted by Mr. Mueller's testimony, as when a woman who had been an infidel, writes him that he was

"the first person by whose example she learned that there are some men who *live* by faith,"

and that for this reason she had willed to him all that she possessed.

Another reader found these Reports

"more faith-strengthening and soul-refreshing than many a sermon,"

particularly so after just wading through the mire of a speech of a French infidel who boldly affirmed that of all of the millions of prayers uttered every day, not one is answered. We should like to have any candid skeptic confronted with Mr. Mueller's unvarnished story of a life of faith, and see how he would on any principle of "compound probability" and "accidental coincidences," account for the tens of thousands of answers to believing prayer! The fact is that one half of the infidelity in the world is dishonest, and the other half is ignorant of the daily proofs that God is, and is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

From almost the first publication of his Narrative, Mr. Mueller had felt a conviction that it was thus to be greatly owned of God as a witness to His faithfulness; and, as early as 1842, it was laid on his heart to send a copy of the Annual Report gratuitously to every Christian minister of the land, which the Lord helped him to do, his aim being not to get money or even awaken interest in the work, but rather to stimulate faith and quicken prayer.

Twenty-two years later, in 1868, it was already so apparent that the published accounts of the Lord's dealing was used so largely to sanctify and edify saints and even to convert sinners and convince infidels, that he records this as *the greatest of all the spiritual blessings* hitherto resulting from his work for God. Since then thirty years more have fled, and, during this whole period, letters from a thousand sources have borne increasing witness that the example he set has led others to fuller faith and firm confidence in God's word, power, and love; to a deep persuasion that, though Elijah has been taken up, God, the God of Elijah, is still working His wonders.

And so, in all departments of his work for God, the Lord to whom he witnessed bore witness to him in return and anticipated his final reward in a recompense of present and

overflowing joy. This was especially true in the long tours undertaken, when, past threescore and ten, to sow in lands afar the seeds of the Kingdom! As the sower went forth to sow he found not fallow fields only, but harvest fields also, from which his arms were filled with sheaves. Thus, in a new sense the reaper overtook the ploughman, and the harvester, him that scattered the seed. In every city of the United Kingdom and in the "sixty-eight cities" where, up to 1877, he had preached on the continents of Europe and America, he had found converted orphans, and believers to whom abundant blessing had come through reading his reports. After this date, twenty-one years more yet remained crowded with experiences of good.

Thus, before the Lord called George Mueller higher, He had given him a foretaste of his reward, in the physical, intellectual and spiritual profit of the orphans; in the fruits of his wide seed-sowing in other lands as well as Britain; in the scattering of God's word and Christian literature; in the Christian education of thousands of children in the schools he aided; in the assistance afforded to hundreds of devoted missionaries; in the large blessing imparted by his published narrative, and in his personal privilege of bearing witness throughout the world to the gospel of grace.