



# An Orphan Boy's Story

The Rev. Samuel Barriball | Orphan Number 471 | 3 October 1856 – 14 October 1862  
Extract from a talk given by Mr Barriball around 1980

In the year 1856, in the outskirts of the picturesque town of Tavistock, in Devonshire, one bright summer afternoon, a curly-headed little boy of 6 years, was seen playing outside the humble house of an elderly, good-hearted woman. That little boy was an orphan, and the son of the late town missionary. The widowed mother, soon after her husband's death, was the victim of the carelessness of a drunken doctor, in the administering of a poisonous draught of medicine. The little fellow, however, was passionately loved by the old lady referred to, and she steadily persisted in refusing to consent to his removal to the care and training of the great Bristol philanthropist, whose remarkable work had by that time become well known throughout the length and breadth of the land. The grandfather, however, who had taken charge of his only brother, was equally determined to carry his point, and having made all arrangements with the orphan home officials, on the day alluded to the little boy was picked up and taken for his first long railway journey to the City of Bristol, in the company of his grandfather, without the opportunity of saying "goodbye" or giving a parting kiss to the good old soul whose love for the boy was second only to that of the parents who had been so early taken away from him.

On reaching Bristol, a long ride in a cab brought the grandfather and his grandson to the gates of what the founder was always designated "The Lord's Orphan House No 1", and very soon they were ushered into the presence of "George Müller, the Orphan's Friend". These were, briefly, the circumstances that attended my introduction to that great and holy man. That meeting will never be effaced from my memory. After a short conversation and prayer by Mr Müller, (and, O, the influence of that prayer) my grandfather rose to leave, and for a while I was inconsolable. I felt that my heart must break. "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him", are the words that involuntarily come to my mind, as I attempt to describe the tender, loving way in which Mr Müller tried to soothe my young grief-stricken heart. As he took me upon his knees and lovingly caressed my little curly head (excuse my vanity) the tears gradually subsided, only, however, to break out afresh as I was given into the charge of the matron of the department to which I was allocated - viz, the Infant Department, where I found myself in the company of 120 other little boys and girls. "When my father and my mother forsake me then the Lord will take me up" may surely be said to be fulfilled in the experience of the thousands of orphans that have passed through those prayer-supported Homes.

I have before stated that every detail in the great work Mr Müller had undertaken and carried through was placed before the Lord in prayer. As in the raising of money for the work, so also in the selection of those who were to be co-workers with Mr Müller, in the capacity of matrons, nurses, school teachers etc etc, remarkable answers to prayer were realised. He felt it to be absolutely essential that all such should be in deed and in truth sympathisers with him, and also filled with faith and trust in that God that he sought to glorify. As the work grew and fresh workers were needed, in every case the right people came forward and voluntarily gave themselves up to the work - a remarkable testimony to the truth that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Consequently, you can readily believe me when I say that the children were treated with kindness and loving forbearance by those into whose charge they were given, and that very soon the little folk

felt quite at home and happy in their new surroundings. Such was my experience. Of my school life during my short stay in the Junior Section I have little or no recollection, but I will remember that on my transference to the Senior Boys' Department, instead of being placed in Desk No 1, as was the invariable rule, I was placed in Desk No 3. This was due to the progress I had made in pensmanship; unfortunately for me, this exceptional treatment roused feelings of jealousy, and for a while I sailed upon troubled waters.

In the working of the Houses, Mr Müller showed himself to be a remarkable organiser, and everything was done with clock-like regularity and precision. Every morning at six o'clock, winter and summer alike, a loud sounding bell, a rival to the "Big Ben" of Westminster, roused us from our slumbers, and if any boy happened to be indifferent to its sonorous tones, the Master's slipper always proved effectual in bringing from under the bedclothes the slumbering miscreant. A plunge in cold water was the first morning luxury indulged in, not so keenly enjoyed in the winter, as it was in the summer months of the year. "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" was also undoubtedly part of Mr Müller's gospel, and every boy was minutely examined before completing his morning's toilet.

As 7 o'clock all were seated in the schoolroom desks, with open Bibles, and half an hour was spent in silent reading of the Scriptures. A vivid memory of the impressiveness of that 30 minutes lingers with me today, and whilst I would not for one moment deprecate the object of such an arrangement, I sometimes feel inclined to question the wisdom of placing "The Book of Books" for so long a time between a lot of hungry boys and that daily legitimate object of their desires - a good breakfast. And that was not the end of our trial of patience, for when seated before a good basin of Scotch oatmeal and milk we had the privilege of listening to a short reading and exposition of Scripture - "Brevity" was indeed to us the very essence of wisdom.

A good sound English education was and is still is imparted, and our round of school studies was pretty much the same as that found in our middle class elementary day schools. The playgrounds were liberally equipped with swings, jumping boards, etc and that part of school life was thoroughly enjoyed in the Houses, and entered into with a remarkable zest. The Homes are surrounded with large kitchen gardens, and it was the rather doubtful privilege of the older boys to have many opportunities of displaying any qualifications they possessed for taking up the profession of market gardeners. To one recreation, however, we entertained a most decided aversion, and that was the weeding of the large drying ground that was a necessary adjunct to a laundry of the proportion there required. I distinctly remember that on one cold, but bright winter's day, the prospect of an hour or two spent in that delightful pastime produced a sudden epidemic of indisposition among the boys qualified for such work. An enquiry into the professed ailments by the House Doctor elicited from one boy that he had the stomach ache somewhere in the region of the throat and chest. Needless to say, he failed to prove his case, and he was sentenced to two hours' weeding the drying ground forthwith, without the option of taking physic. I may here remark that the speaker was not the ingenious youth referred to, and I cannot exactly remember what was the state of my bodily health on that occasion.

In no way could it be said that the life of the inmates was monotonous. The Home being situated upon high ground and well outside the not altogether inviting City of Bristol, country walks, now and again varied by a patrol into the City, were of very frequent occurrence. In the summertime cricket and other games were freely indulged in in fields nearby, through the kind permission of the owners.

During the course of a twelve-month it may safely be said the Homes were visited by many thousands of persons, including representatives of all nationalities. Wednesday was the visiting day for No 1 Orphan House, and was always looked forward to with interest by the children.

A few words of kindness and cheer often fell from the lips of visitors of note. One comes to my mind, and in fact will always be cherished by me so long as memory holds good. Remaining behind, after the other visitors had passed on, a ministerial looking gentleman, in clear tones said:

“Boys, I want to ask you to strive to do three things: strive to be wise, strive to rise, strive for the skies. Goodbye and God bless you.”

Three excellent objects worth striving for surely, and I should like to pass on the same request tonight to every young man and woman within hearing of my voice this evening.

The moral atmosphere of the School was of the highest possible character. So thoroughly safeguarded were the children in this respect, that all letters to the children in the Home were carefully read, so that nothing should get into their hands calculated to have injurious moral effect upon them. The same strict oversight was placed upon books, too. Brotherly love and kindness to each other was also continually inculcated, as one illustration will suffice to show:

The most pleasure-affording event of the year to the orphans was the excursion in vans, etc, to Shirehampton, a lovely village situated at the mouth of the River Avon, and where a gentleman's picturesque grounds were thrown open for the occasion. One of the privileges of this outing was the spending of a small sum of money on such things as little folks generally have a weakness for. Every child received a like sum and it was drawn from the money standing to the account of the scholars in the School Bank, which consisted of a large drawer, divided into so many numbered partitions. I must here explain that every boy was known by a distinctive number, which was placed upon all articles of clothing, books, bed, etc etc. My number was 5, and into partition 5 all monies received by me, either from relatives or visitors, or persons in the city when out on errands, were placed. On the evening preceding the outing this remarkable drawer was brought forth, and a very interesting ceremony gone through. The boys were all seated in the desks, and each division was looked into to see whether it contained the wherewith for the outing expenditure. Some divisions were veritable mines of juvenile wealth, whilst others were characterised by an emptiness sad to contemplate. However, “Bear ye one another's burdens” was a Scriptural injunction not lost sight of on this occasion, for so soon as in mournful tones the Master announced that Number so and so had nothing, he was instantly greeted with responses such as these: “No 5 will give 2d”, “No 6 will give 1d” and so on till the required amount was placed in the empty coffer. It thus happened that no lad went for the outing without being for one day in the year at least as well off as his neighbour. On one of these festive occasions I well remember strolling through the village and meeting of my schoolmates who was evidently in great trouble, for he was shedding tears that were certainly not tears of joy. “What is the matter?” I asked. Restraining his sobs, and brushing away his tears, he said “I've bought a penn'orth of cake, and I've lost it”. This youth evidently must have had an insatiable appetite for cake, for if there was one thing in evidence more than another at tea-time, it was “plum cake”. His stock of patience was small, and he evidently could not wait for tea-time to come.

September 27 was another red-letter day in the year. And why? It was the birthday of one who had a place in the affections of every orphan child on Ashley Down, namely George Müller, well-known by the name of the Orphan's Friend. As in all true and loving Homes, these anniversaries afford opportunities for expressions of love and regard, so on Ashley Down, on every succeeding Sept 27, the hearts of hundreds, yea, in after years, thousands, of orphan children throbbed with loving gratitude, eagerly seizing that day as an opportunity for its expression. The gift generally consisted of money, subscribed unstintingly from the remarkable drawer that was so much in evidence the evening before the Summer Outing. This gift was always accompanied by a suitable letter indicted by one of the orphans. Some 12 letters were penned, and the most suitable and best written epistle was chosen for transmission to Mr Müller. To the author of the chosen letter was a much-coveted honour, and one which I am proud to say I secured on the occasion of the last birthday prior to my leaving the Home. Mr Müller never contented himself with a mere letter of thanks. This gift from "his dear children", as he often called us, was too much valued by him for that. A personal visit, and a loving and grateful talk to us, always followed, and the spectacle of this Godly man, standing erect 6ft 6in in height, with a countenance beaming with love, looking into the upturned faces of hundreds of children who had known, or been conscious of, little or nothing of parental care and affection, can be better imagined than described. There were many other occasions of special interest in the inner life of the school, notably Christmas time, when everything was done to impart brightness and joy to the orphans at the festive season of the year.

It was during my residence of seven years in the Homes that the work showed its most remarkable growth and development. Scarcely were the 300 orphans securely housed and cared for, when Mr Müller became possessed of the desire to care for 1,000 instead of 300, and just as the year 1851 was about to dawn, this yearning desire had matured into a set purpose. But George Müller, with his uniform carefulness and prayerfulness, sought to be assured that he would be fulfilling the will of God in thus undertaking such an additional burden of care and responsibility, and reasons for and against such a course were conscientiously weighed. To provide for another 700 orphans would involve an outlay of £35,000, for the buildings and outfit, in addition to another £8,000 annual expenditure for their sustenance and training. Day by day the matter was brought to the Lord in prayer, and on January 4, 1851, at a time when no human being, not even his own wife, knew of Mr Müller's intentions, a gift of £3,000 was received, to be used entirely at Mr Müller's discretion. After waiting for nearly 19 months, and daily receiving something in answer to prayer, on January 4, 1853, exactly two years after receiving the gift of £3,000, Mr Müller received an intimation that there was about to be paid to him as the joint donation of several Christians, the sum of £8,100, of which £6,000 was put to the building fund. At this time, there were nearly 500 orphan children waiting for admission to the Home, and Mr Müller prayed earnestly that the way might be opened for the new building to be begun. On May 26, 1853, the amount put aside for the building fund totalled £12,500. Twice that sum was needed, however, before the new house could be begun without risk of debt. Two long years of continuance in faith and prayer followed, when, again in January, 1855, another gift of £5,700 was forwarded as the united offering of several Christian friends. On May 26, 1856, five years after George Müller began to pray about the building of the Orphan House No 2, £30,000 were in hand, and on November 12, 1857, the House was opened for 400 orphans, and a balance left of £2,300. It is also remarkable that all the necessary helpers required were obtained without advertising or solicitation in any form. In answer to prayer suitable helpers came forward and gave themselves up to the work, in many cases making great sacrifice in so doing.

Orphan House No 3 was opened on March 12, 1862, with over £10,000 in hand for current expenses. The needful helpers, however, were not forthcoming and three times a day Mr Müller resorted to prayer that this difficulty might be removed. One after another was added to the staff, and there was finally no hindrance to the work on that account.

These three immense buildings, accommodating 1,150 orphans, stood as a monument of George Müller's faith and trust in God, when in the latter part of the year 1862 I went forth into the world to commence for myself the battle of life. But the work was destined to grow yet much larger, for on November 5, 1868, Orphan Houses No 4, and on January 6, 1870, No 5, were opened, costing £56,000, and a balance of several thousands of pounds left for general purposes. Accommodation was thus provided for the maintenance and training of 2,050 orphan children, involving a total expenditure of £115,000, and a yearly sum of £70,000 for maintenance of orphans and the 112 helpers engaged in the work. Mr Müller never asked for a penny. All was sent in response to prayer and trust in God.

I have already alluded to my first introduction, at the age of 6 years to the great and good man, but I feel that my talk this evening would be incomplete with an allusion to my leave-taking at the age of 13 years and a half, of one whom I had learned to love and revere. It was the unspeakable privilege of every orphan boy and girl, on the afternoon prior to departure from the home, to pay a special visit to Mr Müller's private room, to have a talk together, with reading of the Scriptures and prayer. I venture to say that the influence of that parting interview has been a lifelong and abiding inspiration to a good and useful life in the case of a very large percentage of those who pass from under Mr Müller's care. It was indeed a priceless heritage to go forth into life's battle with a prayer from such a man that God's blessing may rest upon you, and be your portion for evermore. As a parting gift Mr Müller presents to each child with a new half-crown, a Bible and two volumes of "The Lord's Dealings with George Müller", which is really an autobiography.

From the commencement of Mr Müller's work in Bristol he published yearly a report of the Lord's dealings with him, and these reports were full of cases of remarkable answers to prayer in connection with the immense undertaking in which he was engaged. A few instances will suffice to show how wonderfully God helped his servant in times of special difficulty and trial of faith. On more than one occasion Mr Müller had not a penny in hand, and yet there were hundreds of children to be clothed, fed and educated. Yet under such circumstances George Müller was perfectly calm. There was no panic. He knew that God was by those means trying his faith and trust in Him. Prayer was the only resource, and God always opened up the way. I distinctly remember that on one occasion our usual bountiful breakfast of oatmeal porridge and milk was conspicuous by its absence. No funds and no breakfast. During that morning a letter was received containing a cheque for £500, and also a first consignment of a gift of 500 sacks of Scotch oatmeal. Another instance is recorded of a gentleman who was on his way to deposit a very large sum of money in the bank - £5,000, I believe, when an irresistible impulse came over him to send the money to Mr Müller and it was accordingly sent. A tradesman resolved to help the work at Ashley Down by devoting to it the profits from the sale of a certain article in his business. At the end of the first 12 months after making that resolve it was found that the sale of the particular article had trebled. Gifts were also made in kind as well as money, and many were of a very unusual kind, plainly showing the interposition of a Divine Providence in controlling the actions of the donors.

The latter years of Mr Müller's life were spent in that field of Christian toil which might be referred to as his first love. Soon after his conversion he was possessed of an ardent desire to carry the glad news of the Gospel far and wide into the mission field, more particularly to the Jews. But God had other work for him to do. That work having been accomplished - a work which, perhaps, more than anything else, has proclaimed the power of faith and trust in the Fatherhood of God - Mr Müller, at the age of 70 years - a time when others think of settling down and taking life easy,

commenced a preaching tour round the world, a task that was four times repeated. He preached in 45 countries, and travelled in distances more than six times round the world, addressing large audiences. For six or seven years, I had the privilege of sitting under the ministrations of this remarkable man, and though listening as a lad, I was struck by the unusual impressiveness of his discourses. In perusing Dr Pierson's "Life of George Müller" my heart was filled with gratitude as I read an account of one of the many remarkable waves of the Power of the Holy Spirit that swept over the institution. January and February 1860 witnessed one of these great revivals. It began among the younger girls, and then spread among the older boys, until within ten days, over 200 were inquirers after salvation, and a very large proportion of that number rejoiced in the conscious possession of that "peace which passeth understanding". I mention this because I was, by God's goodness and grace, one of the boys referred to. I cannot refrain from erecting my Ebenezer tonight, after 42 years' experience of the saving power of the grace of God. I have, in my own life, been conscious of many remarkable answers to prayer. My way in life has been most providentially opened up, and I have proved the trust of those words "Commit thy way unto the Lord and He will direct thy path". To return to my subject, in May 1892, Mr Müller's last mission tour closed, and again he settled down to his work at the Orphan Houses, and preaching at Bethesda Chapel, and elsewhere as God deemed to appoint. Though 86 years of age, his health was remarkably good, and he laboured on till March 1898. On Sunday, March 6, 1898, he spoke at Alma Road Chapel, and Monday evening was present at a prayer service at Bethesda, in his usual health. Two days later he retired to rest as usual, and when his customary cup of tea was taken to his bedroom the following morning, the venerable patriarch, in his 93rd year, was found lying dead by the side of his bed. "He was not for God took him."

It is needless to say that the funeral for so remarkable a man witnessed such a popular tribute of affection as is seldom seen. Tens of thousands of people reverently stood along the route of the simple procession; men left their workshops and offices, women left their elegant houses or humble kitchens, all seeking to pay a last token of respect. Bristol had never before witnessed such a scene.

A brief service was held at Orphan House No 3, where over 1,000 children met, who for a second time had lost a father. The studiously plain elm coffin, without floral offerings by request, was placed in front of the reading desk in the large dining room, and the address was given by Mr James Wright (son-in-law, and who became Mr Müller's successor, eminently fitted as he was to take up Mr Müller's mantle). During the delivery of the address tears freely flowed from the eyes of the orphans, tears that were more eloquent than words as a token of affection for the dead. A very large number of the children had expressed a desire to follow the remains of their departed benefactor to their last resting place. The morning, however, of the funeral, witnessed a heavy and continuous downpour of rain. Disappointment was feared. There was no complaining, and can we be surprised to know that prayer was resorted to, that God would in His wisdom and goodness be pleased to stay the rainfall so that the orphans might be enabled to join in paying the last token of respect to their departed benefactor. That prayer was answered in an unmistakable manner. Just before the time fixed for the starting of the procession to Arnos Vale Cemetery, the rain abated, the sun shone, and the children were enabled to follow their dear friend to his last earthly resting place. When the children returned, rain again fell heavily

In Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol, today, may be seen a large plain tombstone, bearing the following inscription:

In loving memory of

George Müller

Founder of the Ashley Down Orphanage  
Born Sept 27, 1805  
Fell asleep March 10, 1898  
He trusted in God with whom  
“Nothing shall be impossible”  
And in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Who said “I go unto my Father  
And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name,  
That will I do that the Father  
May be glorified in the Son  
And in His inspired word which declares that  
All things are possible to him that believeth”  
And God fulfilled these declarations in  
The experience of his servant by enabling  
Him to provide and care for about  
Ten thousand orphans.

This memorial was erected by the  
Spontaneous and loving gifts  
Of many of these orphans

# Müllers



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