

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine www.wicketgate.co.uk you will also find the following recordings:

- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Congregational Praise – the singing of our Church during Worship Services
- Sermons preached by Dr N. Needham, W. J. Seaton, and Pastor G. S. Marley
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Archive of Audio Sermons.

The Faith of George Muller of Bristol

Dear Friends,

It's probably true to say that wherever believing people meet together to speak about the subjects of faith and prayer, it's not long before somebody or other mentions the name of George Muller of Bristol. Thomas Spurgeon once described the events surrounding the works of the orphan homes at Ashley Down as "Facts stranger than fiction!" and, indeed, that is an apt description.

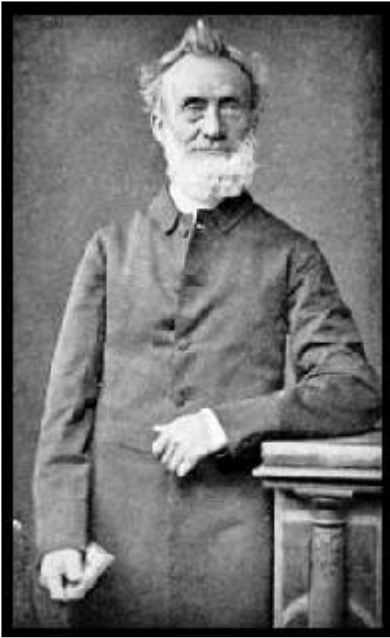
Year after year, up to almost two-thousand orphan children were fed and cared for there, without one appeal ever being made for money, or without any subscribers' list or endowment scheme being drawn up. The whole vast work and under-working took place in an age that knew nothing of any kind of Welfare State, and when few took much notice of the want and suffering that abounded. Most of us have probably handled one of those old "Victorian" books with some graphic reproduction on the front cover. I remember owning one entitled "Froggy's Little Brother;" and a more heart-rending sight it would be hard to imagine than that scene which portrayed "Froggy" pulling his old worn and ragged overcoat around his little brother in an effort to keep out the dank London fog as they lay down to sleep in the shelter of a doorway at night. That picture has never left me, and it was no imaginary picture. It was drawn from life, for that was life for thousands upon thousands of orphan children in those days.

Into such circumstances, then, George Muller came. There were others like him, of course; ;but in the establishing and continuance of what was to become Ashley Down, there was a very real sense in which George Muller showed himself to be “the only one of his mother.”

Who ever heard of setting down almost two-thousand children at a breakfast table and telling them to give thanks, with not one scrap of bread on the table, or one morsel of food in the kitchen? Yet, it happened at Ashley Down; and before the echo of the “Amen” had died away, the baker’s carts were arriving at the front door, and the trays of steaming bread were being borne to the tables. “Fresh bread’s bad for the indigestion,” you say; Ah, well, that’s another story, and wouldn’t have much concerned the children at Ashley Down! And how had it all come about?

Well, it appears that a baker in Bristol, had been unable to sleep the night before. As he lay awake, the thought came into his mind that he should go down to his bakehouse and bake some bread for “Mr Muller’s orphans.” He expressed his plan to his wife, but she told him to go to sleep. He tried to do so, but without success, and eventually he went along the road, knocked up a couple of his workers, and together they delivered the loaves in unison with the orphanage’s Amen. The incident is typical of hundreds that Muller simply put into the category of, “Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” And it’s such incidents that usually assure George Muller’s name a place in any discussion on the subjects of faith and prayer.

Two things we ought to bear in mind with regards to the lives of such believers as George Muller and his like.



The first is that such people had a certain “uniqueness” about them in their calling under the Lord; what you might almost call “a gift” of faith, in that sense. The other is, that their lives were never easy, and they had to be engaged in the daily battles of the Christian life, like each and every one of us.

There is always a tendency within our hearts to believe that unless we can do some “great thing” for the Lord, then it is hardly worth trying to do anything at all. The life of George Muller illustrates the very opposite, for, when all is said and done, George Muller is only one side of the whole George Muller story. He himself tells the story of an old lady who could only muster two pennies for “the work of Mr Muller,” as she put it. “Nevertheless,” she thought to herself, “I must give it.” She set off to the orphanage, and half-apologising presented the two coins; “It is but a trifle,” she said, “but I feel I must give it.” Muller was delighted: the amount needed to meet that particular day’s supply of bread was one penny short, so, in his estimation, God had not only given them what they needed, but twice as much as what they needed!

There is nothing more heart-warming and instructive than to read of Muller’s first steps in his orphanage work. He sat down before the Lord, and with that practicality that marked out his life of faith in this world, he drew up a list of everything that would be required to launch out on the work. First and foremost. “Premises;” then, “one thousand pounds in cash;” finally, “suitable helpers to take care of the children.” He presented his requirements before the Lord, and waited. Two days later the first signs of an answer – one shilling (5p)! It took another two

days to see the delivery of an old wardrobe; and then, the first application for service, which really blessed Muller's heart. "We propose ourselves for the service of the intended orphanage," a young couple wrote, "if you think us qualified for it. Also to give up all the furniture, etc. which the Lord has given us, for its use; and to do this without receiving any salary whatever, believing that, if it be the will of the Lord to employ us, He will supply all our need."

Everything was now ready; but what immediately follows helps to strip away from our thoughts that cold unreality that we can enter into with regards to Christian things of the past. The beds were made; the larders had food in them; the staff was on hand – but there was not one orphan! As Muller relates, he had obviously forgotten to ask for the orphans! Oh, there were plenty of them around, but he hadn't asked for any! He had asked for an orphanage, but not for the orphans. That night, his biography tells us, he bore the whole thing up to the Lord in prayer, and the next day, the first applicant arrived – the first of thousands yet to come.

The works of faith are not always wrought in ways that dazzle our eyes in some blinding flash. So often we look to the general outcome of a thing – George Muller fed thousands of orphans in his day – and not to the bit-by-bit building that goes on, day after day, and year after year. A glance at the Annual Report of the work at Ashley Down bears out the fact that it is normally "By little strokes, Men fell great oaks."

"From a farmer's wife, £1, being a penny for every pound of butter sold during the last year Received also today, three shillings and a half-penny from a grocer, being one penny in the pound of his takings during the past week ... this grocer has

continued to send me,” adds Muller. “week by week one penny in the pound on all his takings, being generally from 3s.2d to 3s.6p per week.”

The absolute “down-to-earth” approach of the life of faith is always evident in the life work of George Muller. The popular Christian-novel brand of things tends more to the “romantic;” in real life terms, this was more akin to Paul’s “*work* of faith and labour of love, and patience of hope in the gospel.”

The tremendous determination of the workers at Ashley Down continuously lifts the work there out of the realms of make-believe. On one occasion, while they were praying for supplies and finding little response, one of the staff expressed the sentiments of the rest; “I feel it scarcely upright for me to pray,” he said, “except I should give what I have.” How often the Lord calls us to “answer our own prayers!” When he told the disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest field that He would send forth labourers into the harvest, it is the disciples themselves who end up going. Prayer and performance are both of the essence of the life of faith. Muller’s total dependence was on the Lord his God, but that dependence only fired his determination in every good effort, and in that we might ever find example and motivation in our lives.

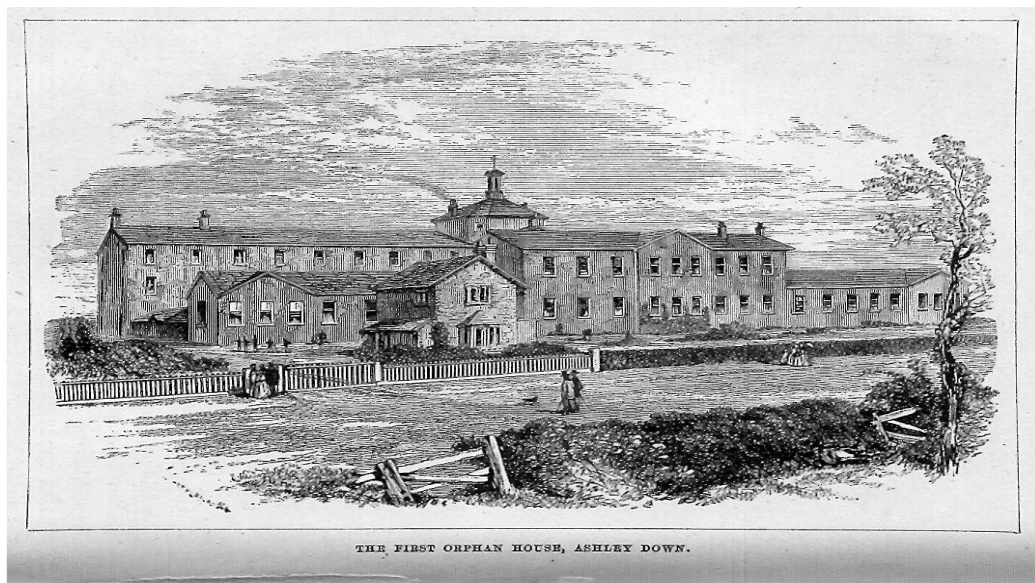
One incident that took place at Ashley Down virtually epitomises the good man’s life, and served to set up an “Ebenezer” to which he often returned. A young believer had read the Annual Report from the orphanage and had given all that he could towards the work. He then prayed that God would move his sister towards making a contribution. The prayer was answered, and his sister sent some expensive pieces of jewellery that were to be sold in an effort to gather together some funds.

When the pieces arrived Muller was absolutely penniless, and the staff had had no wages for weeks. Before he went out to dispose of the various articles, he took a diamond ring that was among that collection, and scratched out on a window pane what became a motto text – “*Jehovah Jireh.*”

“Henceforth,” says his biographer, “whenever in deep poverty, he cast his eyes upon those two words, imperishably written with the point of the diamond on that pane, and thankfully remembered that “*The Lord will provide.*”

The Lord grant us all to be faithful, in living the life of faith, where and how He has placed us, to the glory and the honour of Jesus Christ His Son.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton (April 1983)





Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls

Dear Boys and Girls,

Do you have to be “called” in the morning, or do you wake up at the right time, with a knock on the door or a shake and the words, “Time to get up!” It is always good to be ready on time, ready for breakfast, ready for school, always ready in the morning.

You will be ready for the whole day if you first hear and obey God’s call in the morning. He called Moses, saying, “Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount.”

You cannot hear God’s voice in your ears, but you can hear it in your heart. So, when you get up in the morning, do not leave your bedside without kneeling down and presenting yourself to God. Ask Him to keep you in the right way, the way of truth and goodness, all through the day, for when you do this, you can start the day in earnest, wherever you are, at school, or at work, or at play. Each one has something to do which is their own special bit. God gives to each of His children some task, however small it may be, and He wants us to do our work faithfully, heartily, and with joy, “As to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:23).

Jesus spoke about a man who went away, leaving his servants in charge of his house. Each one had something to do, and the porter was commanded to watch at the door. If the

Master returned without warning, what then? Doing their work faithfully, expecting their Master to come any moment, those servants would be happy to welcome him and eager to show him the house, clean and ready, and safe. They would be happy at his smile of approval and receive the reward he had for them. But if those servants left to themselves neglected their duties and played about all day, or quarrelled amongst themselves, wasting time in argument, what then? The Master would return when they were not looking for him and find his house in disorder, work at a standstill – nothing being done. No smile for those servants, no reward for them.

The Lord Jesus asks and expects us all to do our bit, to learn our lessons or fill in our little daily tasks in such a way that at any time He may come to look at them and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have done little things faithfully today; I will soon give you greater things to do for Me.”

Love, Mrs Seaton



Clippings of Interesting Thoughts

Resolutions and Acts.

During a rather prolonged meeting where several “resolutions” were being discussed by a group of churches, an old pastor stood up and remarked that whereas you read a great deal in the Bible about the Acts of the Apostles, you don’t read anything about their *resolutions*! Perhaps, he suggested, that it was because the churches in that day carried out every thing so speedily and readily that by the time the sacred historian came to write he had nothing else to do except record the execution of the resolution.

He wished that the present meeting, and all meetings, would take the hint!

Sin Confessed.

Before sin can be forgiven it must be confessed. This is the law of God. He has joined together confession and pardon. Let no man seek to put them asunder. It is to be feared that many do not believe in this divine connection. Hence, they presume that God will be merciful unto them, and spare them from going down into the pit. How unreasonable! If we offend a fellow-creature, we have no right to expect his forgiveness till we acknowledge our offence. So, if we sin against God; before we can experience his favour, we must confess to him our sin. *Forgiveness, however*, is not founded on our confession of sin. If so, we should be saved by works and not by grace. God has, in infinite mercy, determined to forgive sin; and to accomplish his determination, he appointed his Son, Jesus Christ the Lord, to suffer and die for the sinner. Forgiveness, therefore, flows from God's own purpose. Let none imagine, then, that there is merit in confession: all the merit is in Christ. When we confess our sins, we are to trust in him alone for acceptance before the Father. We have no claim upon him for pardon; nor can our confessions, however clearly and heartily expressed, possess in themselves any merit. It is our *duty* to confess. It is our *privilege* to receive pardon. (A.A.)

The Curiosi.

There is one sect in the religious world which though not enumerated in any book of denominations, or in any theological dictionary, is yet entitled to a specific notification. This sect, although it has neither distinctive creed, nor separate temples, has one great identifying trait – which is **love of novelty**. I therefore denominate it, “*The curiosi.*” The members of the sect

belong to any preacher who for the time being can interest them with something new, and they attach themselves to every congregation that has something going on out of the ordinary. Thus, are they carried along the streams of profession like twigs, and chips, and straws, that float near the edge of the river and are intercepted by every weed and spun in every current. They would fain persuade you that, like the bee, they are sucking honey from every flower. But they are more like the butterfly that roves through the garden of the Lord, not to sip the most luxurious buds, but to flutter around the most gaudy blossoms in the sacred enclosure. (John A. James).

Teaching and Training.

There are two things that should never be separated in the Christian life; they are *teaching* and *training*.

When the word of God exhorts us to “train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it,” it envisages more than simply informing the child of those things that he ought to know, and ought to be aware of. What is fully involved in the operation is the constant directing of the child and guiding of the child – much as a gardener would direct a certain plant, or “train” a certain plant to grow in the direction that he required.

This we all acknowledge to be a valid and worthwhile exercise with our children – or with our plants, as the case might be – and where we have children, we, no doubt, endeavour to follow the exhortation, and not only see them taught in the things that they ought to know, but also trained in the things they ought to do.

Now, what holds good with our children in general, holds good with the children of God in particular. And it is our duty and calling under God, not only to be taught in the things of His word, but to be trained in the things of His word as well.

We are *taught* in the word of God in the first place, when we are made aware of what the Lord requires of us as His people. This is an absolutely essential exercise, for without the instruction of the word of God to our souls, we have no clear directives to follow in our Christian lives, and no real gauge for our Christian experiences.

It is by His word that the Lord tells us how we must live, and how we must think, and how we must face various issues and circumstances in our pilgrimage. All such things we must know, and all such things we should endeavour to be taught in and instructed in as the children of the living God.

A great deal of the word of God, especially in the epistles, is devoted to *teaching* us things that belong to our faith and this teaching takes in the whole gamut of our lives – from our behaviour in “the house of God,” which is “the pillar and ground of truth” to our behaviour in our own houses, as husbands and wives, or parents and children. Whether as “citizens of heaven,” or citizens in this world yet, there is certainly no shortage of teaching in the word of God regarding our manner of life.

But the true Christian life extends beyond *knowing*. As the Saviour put it on one occasion, “If ye *know* these things, happy are ye if you *do* them.” The real blessedness of Biblical truth to our lives is not in simply being able to comprehend and know the truth; it is in being able to perform the truth, and that’s where spiritual *training* comes into play.

Spiritual training is simply taking that spiritual teaching from the word of God and practising it, and practising it, until it becomes built into the fabric of our Christian living and thinking. There is no such a thing as “perfectionism” in the word of God, but there is, most-assuredly, a manner of life that is to become characteristic of those who name the name of the Saviour, and this is only achieved by us through constant endeavour to “train up” ourselves in the way that we ought to go.

Spiritual training is just as necessary to the spiritual existence as a thousand and one forms of other training are to the natural existence. All the knowledge from the instruction books in the world will produce nothing until the instructions are put into practise, and the more they are practised the more able will the person become in that field.

The Christian life is no different. There are times when we do God’s word because it happens to coincide with what we want to do, or find convenient to do at some given point in our life. Where the training comes in, is in “bending” the plant in the direction that the word requires. The more we endeavour to do that in our lives, the less we will find ourselves “departing” from that way that the Lord directs us.

“We, on Thy holy Word, would feed, and live, and grow;
Go on to know Thee, Lord, and practice what we know.”



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 103 (continued)

Verse 3. “Who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities: who healeth *all* thy diseases.” Many-sided is the character of our heavenly Father, for, having forgiven as a judge, he then cures as a physician. He is all things to us, as our needs call for him, and our infirmities do but reveal him in new characters.

“In him is only good,
In me is only ill,
My ill but draws his goodness forth,
And me he loveth still.”

God gives efficacy to medicine for the body, and his grace sanctifies the soul. Spiritually we are daily under his care, and he visits us, as the surgeon does his patient; *healing* still (for that is the exact word) each malady as it arises. No disease of our soul baffles his skill; he goes on healing *all*, and will do so until the last trace of taint has gone from our nature. The two *alls* of this verse are further lessons for all that is within us praising the Lord.

Charles Hadden Spurgeon

Verse 4. “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction. ...” From his earliest days, the psalmist was the child of Providence. Many were the hairbreadth escapes, and the wonderful deliverances which he experienced. The jaw of the lion, the paw of the bear, at various times threatened to terminate

his existence, and at others the ruthless hand of man. The same God who delivered him from the sword of Goliath, rescued his life from the javelin of Saul. The mighty God who covered his head in the day of battle, delivered him at one moment, from the lords of the Philistines, saved him at another out of the hands of the men of Keilah and again preserved to him his life and throne from the unnatural rebellion of his own son. Well therefore, might the psalmist stir up his soul and all that is within him to bless the Lord with most fervent gratitude who by so many signal deliverances, had “redeemed his life from destruction.”

John Stevenson

Verse 5. “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed as the eagle’s.” By the renovating power of His Spirit, God restores the soul from decrepitude, to the health and strength of a young eagle; so that it can ascend up on high and contemplate the splendour of the Sun of Righteousness. Thus, at the day of the resurrection, clothed anew with salvation and glory, the *body likewise* shall arise from earth and fly away as an eagle towards heaven to begin an immortal life and be for ever young.

Bishop Horne

Verse 8. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” If the one end of mercy were not the beginning of another, we were undone.

Philip Henry

Verse 10. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins: nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” Why is it that God has not dealt with us after our sins? It is because he has dealt with another after our sins. Another who took our sins upon him; of whom it is said, that “God chastened him in his fierce

wrath;” and why did he chasten him, but for our sins? Gracious God, thou art too just to take revenge twice for the same sins; and therefore, not having turned thy fierce wrath upon him, thou wilt not turn it upon us too. Having rewarded him according to our iniquities, thou wilt now reward us according to his merits.

Sir Richard Baker

Verse 12. “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” When sin is pardoned, it is perfectly pardoned. The east and the west are the greatest distance in the world; the terms can never meet together. When sin is pardoned, it is never charged again; the guilt of it can no more return than east can become west, or west become east.

Stephen Charnock

Verse 13. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” The father pitieth his children that are weak in knowledge, and instructs them; pities them when they are forward, and hears with them: pities them when they are sick, and comforts them: when they are fallen, and helps them up again when they have offended, and upon their submission, forgives them. In the same way, “The Lord pitieth them that fear him.”

Matthew Henry

(To be continued)