

## THE CITY OF THE ORPHANS.

From London Society.

The City of the Orphans is situate on Ashley Down, near Bristol, this down being a breezy eminence on which, until lately, the farmer grazed his cattle. To trace the origin of this city we must go back to the year 1835, in which year a poor Prussian—George Muller, who was then living in Bristol, and who had come to England a few years before in connection with a missionary project—conceived that it was his duty to do something towards providing for the numerous orphans who are to be found in our large cities.

At the time that Mr. Muller began to think of this work, he was a minister to a small sect known as the Brethren and had for a fellow-labourer the late Henry Craik, the well-known Hebrew scholar, and brother of the late Professor Craik, author of the "Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties." Mr. Muller had no salary whatever in connection with his ministry, he and Mr. Craik having resolved not to accept a salary, but to leave their needs to be supplied as the Brethren voluntarily should decide.

This arrangement produced very curious results. Sometimes Mr. Muller was very well off, but, as he never made his wants known to anybody, and never, on principle, asked anybody for anything, his means were occasionally very low. On these occasions his outward appearance indicated the emptiness of his exchequer, and individual members of his congregation were in the habit, when they met him with a shabby coat on, of taking him to the tailor's and buying him a new one. But poverty never affected the cheerful spirit of George Muller. In March, 1836, he was living at No. 6 Wilson street, Bristol, and this house he resolved to transform into an orphanage. On the 11th of April he began to take the children in, and by the 18th of the following month he had for his guests no less than twenty-six orphan children who had lost both father and mother by death.

Mr. Muller's position was at this time a very remarkable one. He had no regular income himself, and was, in fact, a poor man. How was he to provide for the twenty-six orphans that he had taken into his house? He resolved to carry out the same principle in respect to the orphans as he had done in respect to himself, that is, never to ask anybody for assistance, and never to make it known publicly who had given him anything. If anybody, sent him a present for the orphans, whether it was in money or goods, it was never acknowledged in connection with the donor's name, but only with initials.

Persons who gave for mere ostentation had consequently no chance of being advertised in connection with the orphanage; for, whether a large or small amount was given, nothing more than the donor's initials were made public.

Under these singular circumstances Mr. Muller opened his orphanage.

Some people thought that the orphanage was a freak of fanaticism, and others predicted that an institution founded on such principles could not exist. But others again, who saw what a large number of children Mr. Muller had to feed, sent him assistance in money, in flour, in draperies, &c.

Still there was a continual chorus of depreciators, who said the thing *must* fail; but, instead of heeding these Mr. Muller who found that more children were brought to him than could be accommodated in his house, he rented a second house, and in a short time he had this one as full as the first.

The wants of this orphan community were literally supplied from day to day by gifts from the public; but nobody was asked for anything. A family of fifty or sixty consumed a good deal of food; the amount for clothing them was no inconsiderable trifle; the rent of two houses involved expenses; and, as Mr. Muller had engaged nurses and teachers for the orphans, there was a further outlay in this direction.

It was no wonder that even persons who were friendly to the young institution should have doubts as to its endurance. There was no list of subscribers, no income of any kind except the promiscuous gifts of the public, who were never solicited to give. Mr. Muller, however, did not share these doubts. He relied solely on the efficacy of prayer, and believing that the care of orphans was a worthy work for a Christian minister, he had no doubt that the means of providing for the orphans would be forthcoming. Help came to him in the most extraordinary way. Many people whom he had never seen sent money for the support of the or-

phans, anonymous donors dropped cash and trinkets into his letter-box, and occasionally he had a considerable sum on hand. But still there were periods when Mr. Muller was down to his last penny, and did not know where he would obtain the next meal for his orphans. In these periods people said he had gone too far, and, while they were discussing what would become of the children at the break-up of the institution, Mr. Muller opened a third house, for boys, and took in more orphans. The fact was that, as the character of the institution became known, applications were made on behalf of orphans, and Mr. Muller, having these cases brought before him, was not disposed to refuse the children admission.

Ordinary prudence would have hesitated, but Mr. Muller seemed to lack this, depending solely on his prayer, and before the end of December, 1837, he had seventy-nine orphans under his care. Surely then it was time to stop. In July and August, 1838, Mr. Muller had frequently not a penny in hand; and, as he made it a rule never to go into debt, the necessities of the institution had to be supplied by the donations as they came in day by day and often hour by hour. At these times nearly everybody lost heart in the work except Mr. Muller. In his published "Narrative" referring to this period, we often find entries which show the extreme necessities of the institution; yet, strange to say, there was never a single instance in which the children lacked either food or clothing. Under the date August 18, 1838, for instance, we find: "I have not a penny in hand for the orphans." On August the 20 he was again "penniless." "To-day I was again without a single penny, when £3 was sent from Clapham, with a box of new clothes for the orphans." In the same year, on 21st of November, he makes this entry: "Never was so reduced in funds as to-day. There was not a single half-penny in hand between the matrons of three houses." But, before the day was over, funds were forthcoming to meet the wants of the day. At the end of 1838 there were in the three houses 86 orphans—31 in the girls' orphan-house, 31 in the infant orphan-house, 24 in the boys' orphan-house.

A man who has a family of nine, even when he has a fair income, thinks he has a good many mouths to fill, but the remarkable peculiarity of Mr. Muller's case was that he had a family of nearly ninety lodged in three large houses; that he provided them with wholesome food in abundance, and also with clothing come whatever! It is true that for many years his means were very low, but it is equally true that in his extremest need help always came. Sometimes he had help from strangers, for even in these early days of the institution it became known that the poor Prussian, whose heart yearned for the orphans, had a family of nearly ninety depending solely upon the public for support. Sometimes a five or ten pound note was dropped anonymously into his letter-box. Other contributors who had observed Mr. Muller's work sent him presents of oatmeal, of treacle, of vinegar, of cloth, of shoes, &c.; but there was no ostentatious publicity to be got out of the contributions, whether they amounted to hundreds of pounds or to a single penny, nothing but the initials of the donor being given in the account in any case. Nor had the donors any right of nomination in respect to candidates for the institution. All Mr. Muller asked of persons who brought orphans to him was: Are both the child's parents dead? Was the child born in wedlock? Is the child destitute? If these questions were satisfactorily answered, there was nothing said about the favor of subscribers or the religion of the deceased parents. The children were taken into the houses so long as there was room for them, in accordance with the order in which application was made for them. Mr. Muller's plan was a literal application of the familiar phrase, first come first served, and from that plan he has never deviated.

In 1839 there was a repetition of the previous year's experience—daily necessities strangely met, and the unfailing confidence of Mr. Muller. On February 3rd he had not a penny in hand, and on the 12th there is similar report in the "Narrative." The same thing occurred at various subsequent dates up to the end of the year, and all through 1840, 1841 and 1842. About the middle of 1843 there were many application for the admission of orphans; but, as the three houses were as full as they could be, having regard to the health of the children, Mr. Muller, to the astonishment of the neighborhood, rented an-

other house and this too he soon filled with orphans.

Up to this time these strangely supported orphan-houses had been a marvel to everybody. Some had scoffed at the efforts of the poor Prussian minister, but many, struck with the true humanity of his daily life, his most tender care of the fatherless and motherless family of which he had taken charge, helped him. Some sent him silver spoons and half-worn trinkets and jewelry; poor men saved a portion of their wages for him; rich men gave to him liberally. But, as his expense was great, all he got occasionally failed him, and then the institution seemed on the verge of destruction, but only to prove once more that there was in it a principle of vitality, which, however incomprehensible it might be to ordinary observers, was nevertheless real.

But although the helpers were many, and were continually increasing, the institution was not without its difficulties in 1844. On the second of April Mr. Muller writes in his "Narrative": "The need of to-day was £3. 0s. 6d. Yesterday I had paid away all the money in hand, but in the afternoon there came in by sale of articles (given for the benefit of the orphans), £2 17s. 5d., by the boxes in the orphan-houses, 5s. 6d., and by needlework of the orphans, 4s. 3d., so that we were enabled to meet the demands of the day."

On the 10th of June he had not a penny left, and on the 12th of June he had only threepence for the next day's maintenance of the orphans. Timely help came however; and the children, who knew nothing of the poverty of their protector, never went without a single meal. On the 24th of July Mr. Muller writes: "To-day two orphans were brought from Bath; for though we are so poor, the work goes forward, and children are received as long as there is room." The poverty and the expansion, in fact, went along together; Mr. Muller's plan being to take in children, irrespective of his present means, so long as he had space in his houses to accommodate them. At the end of July, 1844, Mr. Muller had received in donations £7, 74s. 16s. 4d., without having applied to anybody for a single subscription, and he had then in his four houses 121 orphans.

This large family often exhausted his means, notwithstanding the liberal donations he received. One day he was comparatively rich, another day he was exceedingly poor. Under the date August 7, he writes in his "Narrative," "There came in, when there was not one penny in my hands, 4s. and 3s. 6d. I also found 3s. in the boxes in my house, 10s. was given as the profit of the sale of ladies' bags, and 2s. 6d. as the produce of a forfeit-box at a young ladies' school. Likewise were given to me two gold rings, two gold watch-keys, a pair of ear-rings, a gold brooch, two waist-buckles, a pair of bracelets, a watch-hook, and a broken brooch. Thus we have a little towards the need of to-morrow." All through 1844 there were occasional days when the funds were exhausted, and other days when there was abundance of means, and these vicissitudes continued through 1845 and 1846. In the latter year Mr. Muller resolved to build a house specially adapted for the orphans. The large number of children he then had in his four houses in Wilson street were found to be a great inconvenience to the neighborhood, in consequence of the noise they made during their play hours; and there was also defects in the houses in respect of ventilation, the houses not having been built for so large a number of inmates. Mr. Muller accordingly bought a field at Ashley Down, and in July, 1847, commenced to build his new house, and thus laid the foundation of what we have called the City of the Orphans.

The new house was built to accommodate 300 children, namely, 140 orphan girls above seven years of age, 80 orphan boys above seven, and 80 male and female infant orphans.

This building cost over £15,000, and Mr. Muller transferred his orphans to it from the four houses in Wilson street in June, 1849. The size and accommodation of the house may be estimated when it is stated that it contains about 300 large windows, lighting work-rooms, school-rooms, bakery, store-rooms, teachers' rooms, play-rooms, dormitories, &c. There are also connected with it large open playgrounds with swings, jumping-boards, &c., for the children.

Since the opening of this new orphan-house at Ashley Down in 1849, the progress of Mr. Muller's work is one of the most extraordinary romances that ever was written. It was remarkable that he should have been supplied with

the means of building the first large house at Ashley Down, considering that he never asked any man for help; but what followed was still more remarkable.

He had not had possession of the new house long before he had it filled to its utmost capacity with children. It was wonderful to see three hundred orphans amply provided for in such a noble house through the instrumentality of one man—a simple-minded man who prayed for help when he needed it, and believed that his need would be supplied. As soon as his new house was full, Mr. Muller found that he had to turn away from his doors many orphans who were just as worthy of admission as those he had under his care. He had a great responsibility, for 300 children is no small family, but the insufficiency of his house gave him great anxiety.

When Father Mathew set out on his great crusade against intemperance, he made use of the memorable words, "Here goes, in the name of God." Mr. Muller, on finding the house containing his 300 children too small, resolved to build another, saying that it was God's work and not his. He made his second house larger than his first, and soon filled it with 400 more children, making a total of 700. Still the orphans came to his doors, and, in spite of the warning of people, who said the institution was already too large, he resolved to build a third house, larger than either of the other two, for the accommodation of 450 more orphans. This also he soon filled, thus increasing his family to 1,150.

Number One, Number Two and Number Three, as the houses are called, have been in full operation for some years; and as the three proved inadequate, Mr. Muller resolved to build two more houses, Number Four and Number Five, so that he might increase his family to upwards of 2,000!

And these two new houses are now almost completed, and in a few months will be fully occupied. When Mr. Muller had forty orphans, people said he had too many; what will they say now to his 2,100? The objectors have disappeared, and the institution is accepted as a great fact. Success has made it so; and now, when Mr. Muller's needs are greater than ever, he never has to complain of poverty. He counts his balances by thousands sterling, and continues to extend his "city" till people wonder where it will end.

The sum expended on the buildings in which the orphans are lodged amounts to about £100,000, a large sum when it is remembered that all this has been contributed without the name of any donor being published.

The total sum which Mr. Muller has received for the orphans, since he opened his house for them in 1836, is upwards of £280,000. The letter box of his humble house, which is at 21 Paul street, Bristol (for Mr. Muller does not reside in the institution, although he spends the greater part of the day there), is as valuable as the cap of Fortunatus.

Passers by drop in all sorts of jewelry, and cash, and banknotes without stint. It is no uncommon thing for him to acknowledge in his "Narrative," which he publishes annually, a penny from an errand boy or domestic servant, and in the same line a thousand pounds from "A.B." or some other equally unpersonal initials. He has often received gifts of £500, £1,000, £2,000, £3,000, £4,000, up to £8,000 at one time, and these vast sums are all anonymous so far as the public are concerned. Last year (from May, 1867, to May, 1868,) the expenses connected with the orphans were nearly £34,000! Of this about £12,000 was the current expenses in connection with the orphans, and the chief part of the remainder was in providing new buildings. The cost of each orphan during the year was £12 10s, inclusive of every expense without exception. The general expenses for the previous year were upwards of £27,000.

What becomes of the children when they grow up? The girls remain in the institution till they are able to go to service. Mr. Muller keeps them till they are sufficiently qualified for a situation, and especially till their constitution is sufficiently established.

They generally remain under his care till they are over eighteen years of age.

If there happen to be any who are unfit, on account of delicate health, for domestic service, they are apprenticed to some light business. The girls are greatly in demand as servants, and their thorough training fits them admirably for such a position. Many of the girls now in the institution have been under Mr. Muller's charge for over seventeen years. They are instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, English history, a little