

Chapter 9. The Growth Of God's Own Plant

~Other Speakers M-R: A.T. Pierson:

THE last great step of full entrance upon Mr. M^lller's life-service was the founding of the orphan work, a step so important and so prominent that even the lesser particulars leading to it have a strange significance and fascination.

In the year 1835, on November 20th, in taking tea at the house of a Christian sister, he again saw a copy of Franck's life. For no little time he had thought of like labours, though on no such scale, nor in mere imitation or Franck's, but under a sense of similar divine leading. This impression had grown into a conviction, and the conviction had blossomed into a resolution which now rapidly ripened into corresponding action. He was emboldened to take this forward step in sole reliance on God, by the fact that at that very time, in answer to prayer, ten pounds more had been sent him than he had asked for other existing work, as though God gave him a token of both willingness and readiness to supply all needs.

Nothing is more worthy of imitation, perhaps, than the uniformly deliberate, self-searching, and prayerful way in which he set about any work which he felt led to undertake. It was preeminently so in attempting this form of service, the future growth of which was not then even in his thought. In daily prayer he sought as in his Master's presence to sift from the pure grain of a godly purpose to glorify Him, all the chaff of selfish and carnal motives, to get rid of every taint of worldly self-seeking or lust of applause, and to bring every thought into captivity to the Lord. He constantly probed his own heart to discover the secret and subtle impulses which are unworthy of a true servant of God; and, believing that a spiritually minded brother often helps one to an insight into his own heart, he spoke often to his brother Craik about his plans, praying God to use him as a means of exposing any unworthy motive, or of suggesting any scriptural objections to his project. His honest aim being to please God, he yearned to know his own heart, and welcomed any light which revealed his real self and prevented a mistake.

Mr. Craik so decidedly encouraged him, and further prayer so confirmed previous impressions of God's guidance, that on December 2, 1835, the first formal step was taken in ordering printed bills announcing a public meeting for the week following, when the proposal to open an orphan house was to be laid before brethren, and further light to be sought unitedly as to the mind of the Lord.

Three days later, in reading the Psalms, he was struck with these nine words:

"OPEN THY MOUTH WIDE, AND I WILL FILL IT."
(Psalm lxxxi.10.)

From that moment this text formed one of his great life-mottoes, and this promise became a power in moulding all his work. Hitherto he had not prayed for the supply of money or of helpers, but he was now led to apply this scripture confidently to this new plan, and at once boldly to ask for premises, and for one thousand pounds in money, and for suitable helpers to take charge of the children. Two days after, he received, in furtherance of his work, the first gift of money-- one shilling-- within two days more the first donation in furniture-- a large wardrobe.

The day came for the memorable public meeting-- December 9th. During the interval Satan had been busy hurling at Mr. M^lller his fiery darts, and he was very low in spirit. He was taking a step not to be retraced without both much humiliation to himself and reproach to his Master: and what if it were a misstep and he were moving without real guidance from above! But as soon as he began to speak, help was given him. He was borne up on the Everlasting Arms, and had the assurance that the work was of the Lord. He cautiously avoided all appeals to the transient feelings of his hearers, and took no collection, desiring all these first steps to be calmly taken, and every matter carefully and prayerfully weighed before a decision. Excitement of emotion or kindlings of enthusiasm might obscure the vision and hinder clear apprehension of the mind of God. After the meeting there was a voluntary gift of ten shillings, and one sister offered herself for the work. The next morning a statement concerning the new orphan work was put in print, and on January 16, 1836, a supplementary statement appeared.*

*Appendix E. Narrative 1: 143-146, 148-152, 154, 155.

At every critical point Mr. M^lller is entitled to explain his own views and actions; and the work he was now undertaking is so vitally linked with his whole after-life that it should here have full mention. As to his proposed orphan house he gives three chief reasons for its establishment:

1. That God may be glorified in so furnishing the means as to show that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him;
2. That the spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children may be promoted;
3. That their temporal good may be secured.

He had frequent reminders in his pastoral labours that the faith of those children greatly needed strengthening; and he longed to have some visible proof to point to, that the heavenly Father is the same faithful Promiser and Provider as ever, and as willing to Prove Himself the Living God to all who put their trust in Him, and that even in their old age He does not forsake those who rely only upon Him. Remembering the great blessing that had come to himself through the work of faith of Franck^Å he judged that he was bound to serve the Church of Christ in being able to take God at His word and rely upon it.

If he, a poor man, without asking any one but God, could get means to carry on an orphan house, it would be seen that God is FAITHFUL STILL and STILL HEARS PRAYER. While the orphan work was to be a branch of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution, only those funds were to be applied thereto which should be expressly given for that purpose; and it would be carried on only so far and so fast as the Lord should provide both money and helpers.

It was proposed to receive only such children as had been bereft of both parents, and to take in such from their seventh to their twelfth year, though later on younger orphans were admitted; and to bring up the boys for a trade, and the girls for service, and to give them all a plain education likely to fit them for their life-work.

So soon as the enterprise was fairly launched, the Lord's power and will to provide began at once and increasingly to appear; and, from this point on, the journal is one long record of man's faith and supplication and of God's faithfulness and interposition. It only remains to note the new steps in advance which mark the growth of the work, and the new straits which arise and how they are met, together with such questions and perplexing crises as from time to time demand and receive a new divine solution.

A foremost need was that of able and suitable helpers, which only God could supply. In order fully to carry out his plans, Mr. M^Åller felt that he must have men and women like-minded, who would naturally care for the state of the orphans and of the work. If one Achan could disturb the whole camp of Israel, and one Ananias or Sapphira, the whole church of Christ, one faithless, prayerless, self-seeking assistant would prove not a helper but a hinderer both to the work itself and to all fellow-workers. No step was therefore hastily taken. He had patiently waited on God hitherto, and he now waited to receive at His hands His own chosen servants to join in this service and give to it unity of plan and spirit.

Before he called, the Lord answered. As early as December 10th a brother and sister had willingly offered themselves, and the spirit that moved them will appear in the language of their letter:

"We propose ourselves for the service of the intended orphan house, 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 needs."

Other similar self-giving followed, proving that God's people are willing in the day of His power. He who wrought in His servant to will and to work, sent helpers to share his burdens, and to this day has met all similar needs out of His riches in glory. There has never yet been any lack of competent, cheerful, and devoted helpers, although the work so rapidly expanded and extended.

The gifts whereby the work was supported need a separate review that many lessons of interest may find a record. But it should here be noted that, among the first givers, was a poor needlewoman who brought the surprising sum of one hundred pounds, the singular self-denial and whole hearted giving exhibited making this a peculiarly sacred offering and a token of God's favour. There was a felt significance in His choice of a poor sickly seamstress as His instrument for laying the foundations for this great work. He who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, passing by the rich, mighty, and noble somethings of this world, chose again the poor, weak, base, despised nothings, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

For work among orphans a house was needful, and for this definite prayer was offered; and April 1, 1836, was fixed as the date for opening such house for female orphans, as the most helplessly destitute. The building, No. 6 Wilson Street, where Mr. M^Åller had himself lived up to March 25th, having been rented for one year, was

formally opened April 21st, the day being set apart for prayer and praise. The public generally were informed that the way was open to receive needy applicants, and the intimation was further made on May 18th that it was intended shortly to open a second house for infant children-- both boys and girls.

We now retrace our steps a little to take special notice of a fact in Mr. M^r. Miller's experience which, in point of time, belongs earlier.

Though he had brought before the Lord even the most minute details about his plans for the proposed orphan work and house and helpers, asking in faith for building and furnishing, money for rent and other expenses, etc., he confesses that he had never once asked the Lord to send the orphans! This seems an unaccountable omission; but the fact is he had assumed that there would be applications in abundance. His surprise and chagrin cannot easily be imagined, when the appointed time came for receiving applications, February 3rd, and not one application was made! Everything was ready except the orphans. This led to the deepest humiliation before God. All the evening of that day he literally lay on his face, probing his own heart to read his own motives, and praying God to search him and show him His mind. He was thus brought so low that from his heart he could say; that, if God would thereby be more glorified, he would rejoice in the fact that his whole scheme should come to nothing. The very next day the first application was made for admission; on April 11th orphans began to be admitted; and by May 18th there were in the house twenty-six, and more daily expected. Several applications being made for children under seven, the conclusion was reached that, while vacancies were left, the limit of years at first fixed should not be adhered to; but every new step was taken with care and prayer, that it should not be in the energy of the flesh, or in the wisdom of man, but in the power and wisdom of the Spirit. How often we forget that solemn warning of the Holy Ghost, that even when our whole work is not imperiled by a false beginning, but is well laid upon a true foundation, we may carelessly build into it wood, hay, and stubble, which will be burned up in the fiery ordeal that is to try every man's work of what sort it is!

The first house had scarcely been opened for girls when the way for the second was made plain, suitable premises being obtained at No. 1 in the same street, and a well-fitted matron being given in answer to prayer. On November 28th, some seven months after the opening of the first, this second house was opened. Some of the older and abler girls from the first house were used for the domestic work of the second, partly to save hired help, and partly to accustom them to working for others and thus give a proper dignity to what is sometimes despised as a degrading and menial form of service. By April 8, 1837, there were in each house thirty orphan children.

The founder of this orphan work, who had at the first asked for one thousand pounds of God, tells us that, in his own mind, the thing was as good as done, so that he often gave thanks for this large sum as though already in hand. (Mark xi.24; 1 John v. 13,14.) This habit of counting a promise as fulfilled had much to do with the triumphs of his faith and the success of his labour. Now that the first part of his Narrative of the Lord's Dealings was about to issue from the press, he felt that it would much honour the Master whom he served if the entire amount should be actually in hand before the Narrative should appear, and without any one having been asked to contribute. He therefore gave himself anew to prayer; and on June 15th the whole sum was complete, no appeal having been made but to the Living God, before whom, as he records with his usual mathematical precision, he had daily brought his petition for eighteen months and ten days.

In closing this portion of his narrative he hints at a proposed further enlargement of the work in a third house for orphan boys above seven years, with accommodations for about forty. Difficulties interposed, but as usual disappeared before the power of prayer. Meanwhile the whole work of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution prospered, four day-schools having been established, with over one thousand pupils, and more than four thousand copies of the word of God having been distributed.

George M^r. Miller was careful always to consult and then to obey conviction. Hence his moral sense, by healthy exercise, more and more clearly discerned good and evil. This conscientiousness was seen in the issue of the first edition of his Narrative. When the first five hundred copies came from the publishers, he was so weighed down by misgivings that he hesitated to distribute them. Notwithstanding the spirit of prayer with which he had begun, continued, and ended the writing of it and had made every correction in the proof; notwithstanding the motive, consciously cherished throughout, that God's glory might be promoted in this record of His faithfulness, he reopened with himself the whole question whether this published Narrative might not turn the eyes of men from the great Master Workman to His human instrument. As he opened the box containing the reports, he felt strongly tempted to withhold from circulation the pamphlets it held; but from the moment when he gave out the first copy, and the step could not be retraced his scruples were silenced.

He afterward saw his doubts and misgivings to have been a temptation of Satan, and never thenceforth

questioned that in writing, printing, and distributing this and the subsequent parts of the Narrative he had done the will of God. So broad and clear was the divine seal set upon it in the large blessing it brought to many and widely scattered persons that no room was left for doubt. It may be questioned whether any like journal has been as widely read and as remarkably used, both in converting sinners and in quickening saints. Proofs of this will hereafter abundantly appear.

It was in the year 1837 that Mr. M^äller, then in his thirty-second year, felt with increasingly deep conviction that to his own growth in grace, godliness, and power for service two things were quite indispensable:

first, more retirement for secret communion with God, even at the apparent expense of his public work; and

second, ampler provision for the spiritual oversight of the flock of God, the total number of communicants now being near to four hundred.

The former of these convictions has an emphasis which touches every believer's life at its vital centre. George M^äller was conscious of being too busy to pray as he ought. His outward action was too constant for inward reflection, and he saw that there was risk of losing peace and power, and that activity even in the most sacred sphere must not be so absorbing as to prevent holy meditation on the Word and fervent supplication. The Lord said first to Elijah, "Go, HIDE THYSELF" then, "Go, SHOW THYSELF." He who does not first hide himself in the secret place to be alone with God, is unfit to show himself in the public place to move among men. Mr. M^äller afterward used to say to brethren who had "too much to do" to spend proper time with God, that four hours of work for which one hour of prayer prepares, is better than five hours of work with the praying left out; that our service to our Master is more acceptable and our mission to man more profitable, when saturated with the moisture of God's blessing-- the dew of the Spirit. Whatever is gained in quantity is lost in quality whenever one engagement follows another without leaving proper intervals for refreshment and renewal of strength by waiting on God. No man, perhaps, since John Wesley has accomplished so much even in a long life as George M^äller; yet few have ever withdrawn so often or so long into the pavilion of prayer. In fact, from one point of view his life seems more given to supplication and intercession than to mere action or occupation among men.

At the same time he felt that the curacy of souls must not be neglected by reason of his absorption in either work or prayer. Both believers and inquirers needed pastoral oversight; neither himself nor his brother Craik had time enough for visiting so large a flock, many of whom were scattered over the city; and about fifty new members were added every year who had special need of teaching and care. Again, as there were two separate congregations, the number of meetings was almost doubled; and the interruptions of visitors from near and far, the burdens of correspondence, and the oversight of the Lord's work generally, consumed so much time that even with two pastors the needs of the church could not be met. At a meeting of both congregations in October these matters were frankly brought before the believers, and it was made plain that other helpers should be provided, and the two churches so united as to lessen the number of separate meetings.

In October, 1837, a building was secured for a third orphan house, for boys; but as the neighbours strongly opposed its use as a charitable institution, Mr. M^äller, with meekness of spirit, at once relinquished all claim upon the premises, being mindful of the maxim of Scripture:

"As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."
(Rom. xiii.18.)

He felt sure that the Lord would provide, and his faith was rewarded in the speedy supply of a building in the same street where the other two houses were.

Infirmity of the flesh again tried the faith and patience of Mr. M^äller. For eight weeks he was kept out of the pulpit. The strange weakness in the head, from which he had suffered before and which at times seemed to threaten his reason, forced him to rest; and in November he went to Bath and Weston-super-Mare, leaving to higher Hands the work to which he was unequal.

One thing he noticed and recorded: that, even during this head trouble, prayer and Bible-reading could be borne better than anything else. He concluded that whenever undue carefulness is expended on the body, it is very hard to avoid undue carelessness as to the soul; and that it is therefore much safer comparatively to disregard the body, that one may give himself wholly to the culture of his spiritual health and the care of the Lord's work. Though some may think that in this he ran to a fanatical extreme, there is no doubt that such became more and more a law of his life. He sought to dismiss all anxiety, as a duty; and, among other anxious cares, that most subtle and seductive form of solicitude which watches every change of symptoms and rushes

after some new medical man or medical remedy for all ailments real or fancied.

Mr. M^äller was never actually reckless of his bodily health. His habits were temperate and wholesome, but no man could be so completely wrapped up in his Master's will and work without being correspondingly forgetful of his physical frame. There are not a few, even among God's saints, whose bodily weaknesses and distresses so engross them that their sole business seems to be to nurse the body, keep it alive and promote its comfort. As Dr. Watts would have said, this is living "at a poor dying rate."

When the year 1838 opened, the weakness and distress in the head still afflicted Mr. M^äller. The symptoms were as bad as ever, and it particularly tried him that they were attended by a tendency to irritability of temper, and even by a sort of satanic feeling wholly foreign to him at other times. He was often reminded that he was by nature a child of wrath even as others, and that, as a child of God, he could stand against the wiles of the devil only by putting on the whole armour of God. The pavilion of God is the saint's place of rest; the panoply of God is his coat of mail. Grace does not at once remove or overcome all tendencies to evil, but, if not eradicated, they are counteracted by the Spirit's wondrous working. Peter found that so long as his eye was on His Master he could walk on the water. There is always a tendency to sink, and a holy walk with God, that defies the tendency downward, is a divine art that can neither be learned nor practised except so long as we keep "looking unto Jesus": that look of faith counteracts the natural tendency to sink, so long as it holds the soul closely to Him. This man of God felt his risk, and, sore as this trial was to him, he prayed not so much for its removal as that he might be kept from any open dishonour to the name of the Lord, beseeching God that he might rather die than ever bring on Him reproach.

Mr. M^äller's journal is not only a record of his outer life of consecrated labour and its expansion, but it is a mirror of his inner life and its growth. It is an encouragement to all other saints to find that this growth was, like their own, in spite of many and formidable hindrances, over which only grace could triumph. Side by side with glimpses of habitual conscientiousness and joy in God, we have revelations of times of coldness and despondency. It is a wholesome lesson in holy living that we find this man setting himself to the deliberate task of cultivating obedience and gratitude; by the culture of obedience growing in knowledge and strength, and by the culture of gratitude growing in thankfulness and love. Weakness and coldness are not hopeless states: they have their divine remedies which strengthen and warm the whole being.

Three entries, found side by side in his journal, furnish pertinent illustration and most wholesome instruction on this point. One entry records his deep thankfulness to God for the privilege of being permitted to be His instrument in providing for homeless orphans, as he watches the little girls, clad in clean warm garments, pass his window on their way to the chapel on the Lord's day morning. A second entry records his determination, with God's help, to send no more letters in parcels because he sees it to be a violation of the postal laws of the land, and because he desires, as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, to submit himself to all human laws so far as such submission does not conflict with loyalty to God. A third entry immediately follows which reveals this same man struggling against those innate tendencies to evil which compel a continual resort to the throne of grace with its sympathizing High Priest. "This morning," he writes, "I greatly dishonoured the Lord by irritability manifested towards my dear wife; and that, almost immediately after I had been on my knees before God, praising Him for having given me such a wife."

These three entries, put together, convey a lesson which is not learned from either of them alone. Here is gratitude for divine mercy, conscientious resolve at once to stop a doubtful practice, and a confession of inconsistency in his home life. All of these are typical experiences and suggest to us means of gracious growth. He who lets no mercy of God escape thankful recognition, who never hesitates at once to abandon an evil or questionable practice, and who, instead of extenuating a sin because it is comparatively small, promptly confesses and forsakes it,— such a man will surely grow in Christlikeness.

We must exercise our spiritual senses if we are to discern things spiritual. There is a clear vision for God's goodness, and there is a dull eye that sees little to be thankful for; there is a tender conscience, and there is a moral sense that grows less and less sensitive to evil; there is an obedience to the Spirit's rebuke which leads to immediate confession and increases strength for every new conflict. Mr. M^äller cultivated habits of life which made his whole nature more and more open to divine impression, and so his sense of God became more and more keen and constant.

One great result of this spiritual culture was a growing absorption in God and jealousy for His glory. As he saw divine things more clearly and felt their supreme importance, he became engrossed in the magnifying of them before men; and this is glorifying God. We cannot make God essentially any more glorious, for He is infinitely perfect; but we can help men to see what a glorious God He is, and thus come into that holy partnership with

the Spirit of God whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto men, and so glorify Christ. Such fellowship in glorifying God Mr. M^äller set before him: and in the light of such sanctified aspiration we may read that humble entry in which, reviewing the year 1837 with all its weight of increasing responsibility, he lifts his heart to his divine Lord and Master in these simple words:

"Lord, Thy servant is a poor man; but he has trusted in Thee and made his boast in Thee before the sons of men; therefore let him not be confounded! Let it not be said, 'All this is enthusiasm, and therefore it is come to naught.'"

One is reminded of Moses in his intercession for Israel, of Elijah in his exceeding jealousy for the Lord of hosts, and of that prayer of Jeremiah that so amazes us by its boldness:

"Do not abhor us for Thy name's sake! Do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory!"*

*Comp. Numbers xiv.13-19. 1 Kings xix.10; Jer. xiv.21.

Looking back over the growth of the work at the end of the year 1837, he puts on record the following facts and figures:

Three orphan houses were now open with eighty-one children, and nine helpers in charge of them. In the Sunday-schools there were three hundred and twenty, and in the day-school three hundred and fifty; and the Lord had furnished over three hundred and seven pounds for temporal supplies.

From this same point of view it may be well to glance back over the five years of labour in Bristol up to July, 1837. Between himself and his brother Craik uninterrupted harmony had existed from the beginning. They had been perfectly at one in their views of the truth, in their witness to the truth, and in their judgment as to all matters affecting the believers over whom the Holy Ghost had made them overseers. The children of God had been kept from heresy and schism under their joint pastoral care; and all these blessings Mr. M^äller and his true yoke-fellow humbly traced to the mercy and grace of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Thus far over one hundred and seventy had been converted and admitted to fellowship, making the total number of communicants three hundred and seventy, nearly equally divided between Bethesda and Gideon. The whole history of these years is lit up with the sunlight of God's smile and blessing.