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GOD'S BUILDING: THE NEW ORPHAN HOUSES

Account of the New Orphan-House, on Ashley Down, Bristol, from its earliest beginning to June 4, 1846

I BEGAN the service of caring for children who are bereaved of both parents, by death, born in wedlock, and are in destitute circumstances, on Dec. 9, 1835. For nearly ten years I never had any desire to build an Orphan-House. On the contrary, I decidedly preferred spending this means, which might come in, for present necessities, and desired rather to enlarge the work according to the means which the Lord might be pleased to give. Thus it was till the end of October, 1845, when I was led to consider this matter in a way I had never done before. The occasion of my doing so was this: On Oct. 30, 1845, I received from a gentleman, who lived in the street, where the 4 Orphan-Houses were, a polite and friendly letter, in which he courteously stated to me that the inhabitants in the adjoining houses were in various ways inconvenienced by the Orphan-Houses being in Wilson Street. He left to myself the judgment of the case.

This letter I received on Thursday morning, Oct. 30, 1845. Being very much occupied that week, I had scarcely any time to consider the matter. On Monday morning, however, Nov. 3, I set apart some hours for the prayerful consideration of the subject, and after I had besought the Lord to guide me to a right decision, I wrote down the reasons which appeared to me to make it desirable that the Orphans should be removed from Wilson Street, and also the reasons against removing. As far as they are suitable for being stated in print, they were these:

I. Reasons for removing from Wilson Street

1. The neighbours feel themselves inconvenienced by the noise of the children in the play-hours. This complaint is neither without foundation, nor unjust; for many persons are very much inconvenienced by the noise of children, and those living close by the Orphan-Houses must be so during the play-hours, even though the noise be only of that kind, that one could not at all find fault with the dear children on account of it. I should myself feel it trying to my head to live next door to the Orphan-Houses, on that account. I therefore ought to do to others, as I should wish to be done by. This point had never before appeared to me in so serious a light.

2. *The greatness of the number of the inmates in the houses has several times prevented the drains from acting properly, and thus has a few times effected the water in one or two of the neighbours' houses. With reference to these two reasons, as it regards those living near the Orphan-Houses, these words, "Let not your good be evil spoken of," Rom. 14:16, and "Let your moderation (i. e. yieldingness) be known unto all men," Philip 4:5, seemed to me two important portions of the Word of God to be acted out in this matter.*

But in addition to the reasons for removing the Orphans from Wilson Street, on account of the unavoidable occasional inconvenience that comes upon the neighbours, there appeared now to me, when once I was led to consider seriously the reasons for removing the Institution from Wilson Street, other reasons for doing so, in connexion with the work itself, which had occurred to me before, but never in so strong a light as now, when the subject was brought more immediately before me by the letter, in which I was politely requested to remove the Orphans from Wilson Street. These reasons are:

1. *We have no proper play-grounds in Wilson Street. There is one play-ground, which, however, is only large enough for the children of one house at a time; but as there are children in four houses who ought to have the benefit of it, we can not arrange so that all the children have the full benefit of that play-ground, as the meals, the school-hours, the weather, and other hinderances interfere. The dear Orphans ought, I know, to be trained in habits of industry, but children are children, and need to be treated as such; and they should, on account of their health, have the full benefit of a play-ground. But this they cannot have in Wilson Street: and to take them out into the fields for the benefit of bodily exercise, as we have been in the habit of doing, is often very inconvenient.*

2. *We have no ground for cultivation, near the Orphan-Houses, and hence there must be more walking for the children, on account of using proper means for keeping them, with the blessing of God, in health, than is, in other respects, good for them; because frequent walks easily beget in children habits of idleness, which would be especially felt when boys are apprenticed. But this difficulty cannot be obviated by remaining in Wilson Street, and renting a piece of land somewhere else for cultivation; for to get the children ready and conduct them to the piece of ground, not only takes a good deal of time, but is connected with other great inconveniences, yea with insurmountable difficulties, so that we found it needful to give up a small piece of ground which we once rented for about two years for the Orphan-Boys, at a distance of about half a mile from Wilson Street. Thus, by removing from Wilson Street, and obtaining premises surrounded by land for cultivation, we should be able to procure a most important moral benefit for the children, by having the opportunity more fully than we now have, of training them in habits of industry, besides giving to the boys occupation which is more suitable for them than knitting, which is now the only employment they have, besides making their beds, cleaning the house, and attending to the*

cooking of their meals. Moreover, this would be occupation in the open air, which not only would bring their limbs into exercise, but also make walking, for the sake of health, almost entirely needless.

3. If we were to remove from Wilson Street, and obtain premises in the country, we might have all the washing done at home, which now, for want of room, can be only done in part. Thus the girls also would have more laborious work at home, a point of great importance for them, so that they would not feel so much the hardships connected with going out to service.

4. The situation of Wilson Street is perhaps scarcely bracing enough for strengthening the constitution of the Orphans, most of whom, being the offspring of very diseased parents, require a very invigorating place of abode.

5. The present situation is certainly not desirable for the teachers, especially as, when their hours of work are over, they have no garden or fields close to the house, immediately to go into for a little refreshment of body; and for some of them it is too far to go to fields, where they might have bracing air.

6. In times of sickness we are too confined in the houses in Wilson Street. If there were less than 30 children in each house, the average expenses for each child would be too great, it being desirable, as the arrangements are now, that there should not be less than 3 labourers in each house; and yet, if there are 30 children in each house, we are too full in time of sickness, as we have not a single spare room in any of the houses. Now, though the Lord has during all these years most mercifully helped us through such seasons, yet it has not been without inconvenience, and without also, perhaps, having more of the children in one room, at such times, than no account of health is desirable.

7. Even ordinarily, when there is no sickness, it would be desirable to have more room.

There are no premises to be had in Bristol, or in the immediate neighbourhood, where we could have these advantages; for I have been looking about in all directions for this purpose during the last ten years. But suppose there were a large house to be had in one part of the city, and a second a mile off, and a third and a fourth in other directions, such houses, on account of our peculiar position in the work, would not do. For in seasons of need, the distance of the several houses would render it very inconvenient for the labourers to meet together for prayer, to divide the means that may be in hand, etc. Besides, when in seasons of other peculiar difficulties, connected with the work, I wished to meet all my fellow-labourers, there would arise great difficulty by their being divided in different parts of the city. It would also thus be very inconvenient to persons, who wish to see the work, to go from place to place, in order to have a view of all the Orphan-Houses. But this is not all. The more I have

considered the matter, the more am I now persuaded, that no ordinary large houses, built for private families, and therefore only calculated to accommodate 10 or 15 persons, at most, for any length of time in them, will do for charitable institutions of any considerable size, as no ordinary house furnishes the proper advantages of ventilation, a point so needful for the health of the inmates in a charitable institution. There seemed to me, therefore, to remain nothing but to build premises for the purpose.

Müller, George. A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller. Vol. 2. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1886. Print.

After October 1845, Müller began seeking the Lord's will about relocating and expanding his ministry to orphans. What were the two reasons that prompted contemplation of a move?

What Scriptural principle does Müller follow in considering these reasons?

After having been prompted, Müller gave his thoughts and prayers to the consideration of a move. What further reasons does he delineate in support of a move?

How do these reasons demonstrate Müller's concern that the care for the orphans extend beyond mere housing and sustenance?

As was his custom, Müller weighed all sides objectively. Consider the reasons he lists for remaining at Wilson Street:

II. Reasons for Remaining in Wilson Street

1. *God hitherto has pointed out the spot most plainly. At the commencement of the work, in 1835, no other house was to be had but No. 6, Wilson Street. Afterwards, when in 1836 the Infant Orphan-House was on the point of being opened, again I was looking about in all directions, and saw many houses, but found none that was suitable, till all at once, most unlooked for, the occupiers of No. 1, Wilson Street were desirous of immediately leaving that house, and I was able thus to rent it. When in 1837 I was on the point of opening the Boys' Orphan-House, I looked about again for a house in all directions; for I knew not at that time, what I have since learned by experience, that it was so important that all the houses should be near together. After seeking long in vain, I at last found a very large house, not far from Wilson Street, which I rented; but when the occupiers of the houses in the neighbourhood heard that that house had been let for a charitable institution, they threatened the owner with an action, which led him to request me to give up the agreement, which, of course, I did immediately. At last, most unexpectedly, after having looked about in vain in all directions, the occupiers of No. 3, Wilson Street offered it to me, and I rented it for the Orphan Boys. Lastly, in the year 1843, when I was led to see it to be the will of God to go forward in this work, and to establish the Girls' Orphan-House, No. II., for older girls, one particular feature in the matter was, that the house No. 4, in Wilson Street, had been offered to me, without being sought after, when there had not been for about 6 years one single large house to be let in that street.*

[But though hitherto God has pointed out Wilson Street as being the spot where this work should be carried on, may not now the time have come for removing?]

2. *Perhaps we might also rent Nos. 2, 5, and 7, in Wilson Street, and use two out of those three houses for Orphan-Houses, and one of them for an infirmary in case of sickness.*

[But then, I said to myself, would not the objection, which the neighbours on the opposite side of the street might make, on account of the noise of the children in their play-hours, etc. remain? Also the drains would be still more unsuitable, not being constructed for so many inmates; and to alter them would be a heavy expense. The play-ground would be still less sufficient, if two new houses were added. Lastly, there was no reason to think that we could rent Nos. 2, 5, and 7.]

3. *There are these three great objections against building: The considerable sum which is required, and which could be spent for present use upon the Orphans. The pilgrim character of the Christian seems lost in building. The time that it will necessarily take in making arrangements for it.*

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What is demonstrated by such objectivity in weighing the reasons for leaving or remaining at the present location?

When you have made major life decisions in the past (marriage, car/house purchase, job, etc.), did you approach the decision in a similarly objective manner? Did you take the time to list out the pros and cons? Why or why not?

Once Müller became convinced that it was the Lord's will for him to move forward in a relocation and building project, what steps needed to be taken?

How did God provide the land (cf. Appendix G)?

The funds for the purchase of the land and the erection of the buildings came in similar fashion to the way it had always come in, through individuals being led by God to give without ever having been asked. Most of these donations were small, but a few, particularly during this time, were quite large. In fact some of the largest donations to date came in at this time. How did Müller react to large donations? How did he react to small donations? What does this show about Mr. Müller's faith?

How did God provide an architect and overseer for the project?

Up to this point, the orphan ministry had never owned a place of its own. With the purchase of Ashley Down and the erection of permanent structures, Müller saw the need that this work be governed by a group of godly men and not by himself alone. What does this demonstrate about Müller?

What request of Müller's further emphasizes this characteristic?

The permanency the institution took on in the purchase of Ashley Down raised the question in the minds of many, "what would become of the institution after his death?" How did Müller reply?

This chapter, more than any other thus far, pictures everyday life at the orphan houses. Pierson notes that the first thing noticed upon visiting is the magnitude and simplicity of the place. The magnitude is obviously driven by the great need to accommodate the number of orphans. Why were the buildings "*scrupulously plain*"?

Next, Pierson notes: "*Cleanness, neatness, method, and order, however, everywhere reign, and honest labour has always had, at the orphan houses, a certain dignity.*" These attributes could easily be summed up by one word, discipline. Müller was a disciplined man and he sought to instill discipline in those he ministered to.

For what purpose does Scripture command us to discipline ourselves? (1 Tim. 4:7)
