

## TESTIMONY

### Early Days

I was born at Kroppenstaedt, near Halberstadt, in the kingdom of Prussia, on September 27th, 1805. In January, 1810, my parents removed to Heimersleben, about four miles from Kroppenstaedt, where my father was appointed collector in the excise (*i.e.* taxes). As a warning to parents, I mention, that my father preferred me to my brother, which was very injurious to both of us. To me, as tending to produce in my mind a feeling of self-elevation; and to my brother, by creating in him a dislike both towards my father and me.

My father, who educated his children on worldly principles, gave us much money, considering our age; not in order that we might spend it, but, as he said, to accustom us to possess money without spending it. The result was, that it led me and my brother into many sins. For I repeatedly spent a part of the money in a childish way, and afterwards, when my father looked over my little treasure, I sought to deceive him in making up the accounts, either by not putting down all the money which he had given me, or by professing to have more money in hand than was the case, and counting it out accordingly before him. Now, though this deceit was found out at last, and I was punished, yet I remained the same. For before I was ten years old I repeatedly took of the government money which was entrusted to my father, and which he had to make up; till one day, as he had repeatedly missed money, he detected my theft, by depositing a counted sum in the room where I was, and leaving me to myself for a while. Being thus left alone, I took some of the money, and hid it under my foot in my shoe. When my father, after his return, missed the money, I was searched and my theft detected.

Though I was punished on this and other occasions, yet I do not remember that at any time when my sins were found out, it made any other impression upon me than to make me think how I might do the thing the next time more cleverly, so as not to be detected. Hence it came that this was not the last time that I was guilty of stealing.

### At School

When I was between ten and eleven years of age, I was sent to Halberstadt, to the Cathedral Classical School, there to be prepared for the University; for my father's desire was, that I should become a clergyman; not, indeed, that thus I might serve God, but that I might have a comfortable living. My time was now spent in studying, reading novels, and indulging, though so young, in sinful practices. Thus it continued till I was fourteen years old, when my

mother was suddenly removed. The night she was dying, I, not knowing of her illness, was playing at cards till two in the morning, and on the next day, being the Lord's day, I went with some of my companions in sin to a tavern, and then we went about the streets, half intoxicated.

### **Confirmation**

The following day I attended, for the first time, the religious instruction, which I was to receive previous to my confirmation. This likewise was attended to in a careless manner; and when I returned to my lodgings, my father had arrived to fetch my brother and me home to our mother's funeral. This bereavement made no lasting impression on my mind. I grew worse and worse. Three or four days before I was confirmed (and thus admitted to partake of the Lord's supper), I was guilty of gross immorality; and the very day before my confirmation, when I was in the vestry with the clergyman to confess my sins (according to the usual practice), after a formal manner, I defrauded him, for I handed over to him only the twelfth part of the fee which my father had given me for him.

In this state of heart, without prayer, without true repentance, without faith, without knowledge of the plan of salvation, I was confirmed, and took the Lord's supper, on the Sunday after Easter, 1820. Yet I was not without some feeling about the solemnity of the thing, and I stayed at home in the afternoon and evening, whilst the other boys and girls, who had been confirmed with me, walked about in the fields. I also made resolutions to turn from those vices in which I was living, and to study more. But as I attempted the thing in my own strength, all soon came to nothing, and I still grew worse.

Six weeks after my confirmation I went for a fortnight to Brunswick, to a sister of my father, where I became attached to a young female, who was a Roman Catholic. My time till Midsummer, 1821, was spent partly in study, but in a great degree in playing the pianoforte and guitar, reading novels, frequenting taverns, forming resolutions to become different, yet breaking them almost as fast as they were made. My money was often spent on my sinful pleasures, through which I was now and then brought into trouble, so that once, to satisfy my hunger, I stole a piece of coarse bread, the allowance of a soldier who was quartered in the house where I lodged. What a bitter, bitter thing is the service of Satan, even in this world!

At Midsummer, 1821, my father obtained an appointment at Schoenebeck, near Magdeburg, and I embraced the opportunity of entreating him to remove me to the Cathedral Classical School of Magdeburg; for I thought, that, if I could but leave my companions in sin, and get out of certain snares, and be placed under other tutors, I should then live a different life. But as my dependence in this matter also was not upon God, I fell into a still worse state. My father consented, and I was allowed to leave Halberstadt, and to stay at

Heimersleben till Michaelmas. During this time I superintended, according to my father's wish, certain alterations which were to be made in his house there, for the sake of letting it profitably. Being thus quite my own master, I grew still more idle, and lived as much as before in all sorts of sin.

When Michaelmas came, I persuaded my father to leave me at Heimersleben till Easter, and to let me read the classics with Dr. Nagel, a clergyman living in the same place. As he was a very learned man, and also in the habit of having pupils under his care, and a friend of my father, my request was granted. I was now living on the premises belonging to my father, under little real control, and entrusted with a considerable sum of money, which I had to collect for my father. My habits soon led me to spend a considerable part of this money, giving receipts for different sums, yet leaving my father to suppose I had not received them.

### **Imprisoned**

In November I went on a pleasure excursion to Magdeburg, where I spent six days in much sin; and though my absence from home had been found out by my father, before I returned from thence, yet I took all the money I could obtain and went to Brunswick, after I had, through a number of lies, obtained permission from my tutor. The reason of my going to Brunswick was, the attachment I had formed eighteen months previously to the young female residing there. I spent a week at Brunswick, in an expensive hotel. At the end of the week my money was expended. This, as well as the want of a passport, prevented my staying any longer in the hotel; but as I still wished to remain at Brunswick, I went to my uncle, the husband of my father's sister, and made some excuse for not having gone to him in the first instance. My uncle intimated, after a week, that he did not wish me to remain with him any longer.

I then went, without money, to another hotel, in a village near Brunswick, where I spent another week in an expensive way of living. At last, the owner of the hotel, suspecting that I had no money, asked for payment, and I was obliged to leave my best clothes as a security, and could scarcely thus escape from being arrested. I then walked about six miles, to Wolfenbittel, went to an inn, and began again to live as if I had plenty of money. Here I stayed two days, looking out for an opportunity to run away; for I had now nothing remaining to leave as a pledge. But the window of my room was too high to allow of my escaping, by getting down at night. On the second or third morning I went quietly out of the yard, and then ran off; but being suspected and observed, and therefore seen to go off, I was immediately called after, and so had to return.

I now confessed my case, but found no mercy. I was arrested, and taken between two soldiers to a police officer. Being suspected by him to be

a vagabond or thief, I was examined for about three hours, and then sent to gaol (*i.e.* prison). I now found myself, at the age of sixteen, an inmate of the same dwelling with thieves and murderers, and treated accordingly. My superior manners profited nothing. For though, as a particular favour, I received the first evening some meat with my bread, I had the next day the common allowance of the prisoners, very coarse bread and water, and for dinner vegetables, but no meat. My situation was most wretched. I was locked up in this place day and night, without permission to leave my cell. The dinner was such that on the first day I completely loathed it, and left it untouched. The second day I took a little, the third day all, and the fourth and following days I would fain have had more. On the second day I asked the keeper for a Bible, not to consider its blessed contents, but to pass away the time. However, I received none. Here then I was; no creature with me; no book, no work in my hands, and large iron rails before my narrow window.

During the second night I was awakened out of my sleep by the rattling of the bolts and keys. Three men came into my room. When I asked them in my fright what it meant, they laughed at me, continuing quietly to try the iron rails, to see whether I could escape. After a few days I found out that a thief was imprisoned next to me, and, as far as a thick wooden partition would allow of it, I conversed with him; and shortly after the governor of the prison allowed him, as a favour to me, to share my cell. We now passed away our time in relating our adventures, and I was by this time so wicked, that I was not satisfied with relating things of which I had been really guilty, but I even invented stories to show what a famous fellow I was. I waited in vain day after day to be liberated. After about ten or twelve days my fellow prisoner and I disagreed, and thus we two wretched beings, to increase our wretchedness, spent day after day without conversing together. I was in prison from December 18th, 1821, till January 12th, 1822, when the keeper came and told me to go with him to the police office.

Here I found that the Commissioner, before whom I had been tried, had first written to my uncle at Brunswick, and when he had written in reply, that it was better to acquaint my father with my conduct, the Commissioner had done so; and thus I was kept in prison till my father sent the money which was needed for my traveling expenses, to pay my debt in the inn, and for my maintenance in the prison. So ungrateful was I now, for certain little kindnesses shown to me by my fellow prisoner, that, although I had promised to call on his sister, to deliver a message from him, I omitted to do so; and so little had I been benefitted by this my chastisement, that, though I was going home to meet an angry father, only two hours after I had left the town where I had been imprisoned, I chose an avowedly wicked person as my traveling companion for a great part of my journey.

## **Outward Reformation**

My father, who arrived two days after I had reached Heimersleben, after having severely beaten me, took me home to Schoenebeck, intending to keep me there till Easter, and then to send me to a classical school at Halle, that I might be under strict discipline and the continual instruction of a tutor. In the meantime I took pupils, whom I instructed in Latin, French, arithmetic, and German grammar. I now endeavoured, by diligence in study, to regain the favour of my father. My habits were, as to outward appearance, exemplary. I made progress in my own studies, benefitted my pupils, and was soon liked by everybody around me, and in a short time my father had forgotten all. But all this time I was in heart as bad as ever; for I was still in secret habitually guilty of great sins.

Easter came, and on account of my good behaviour, my diligence in study, and also because I was no expense to my father, but earned much more than I cost him, I easily persuaded him to let me stay at home till Michaelmas. But after that period he would not consent to my remaining any longer with him, and therefore I left home, pretending to go to Halle to be examined. But having a hearty dislike to the strict discipline of which I had heard, and knowing also that I should meet there young men attending the University with whom I was acquainted, enjoying all the liberty of German students, whilst I myself was still at school: for these and other reasons I went to Nordhausen, and had myself examined by the director of the gymnasium, to be received into that school. I then went home, but never told my father a word of all this deception, till the day before my departure, which obliged me to invent a whole chain of lies. He was then very angry; but, at last, through my entreaties and persuasion, he gave way and allowed me to go.

I continued at Nordhausen two years and six months, till Easter, 1825. During this time I studied with considerable diligence the Latin classics, French, history, my own language, etc.; but did little in Hebrew, Greek, or mathematics. I lived in the house of the director, and got, through my conduct, highly into his favour; so much so, that I was held up by him in the first class as an example to the rest, and he used to take me regularly with him in his walks, to converse with me in Latin. I used now to rise at four, winter and summer, and generally studied all the day, with little exception, till ten at night.

But whilst I was thus outwardly gaining the esteem of my fellow creatures, I did not care in the least about God, but lived secretly in much sin, in consequence of which I was taken ill, and for thirteen weeks confined to my room. During my illness I had no real sorrow of heart, yet being under certain natural impressions of religion, I read through Klopstock's works without weariness. I cared nothing about the Word of God. I had about three

hundred books of my own, but no Bible. I practically set a far higher value upon the writings of Horace and Cicero, Voltaire and Moliere, than upon the volume of inspiration. Now and then I felt that I ought to become a different person, and I tried to amend my conduct, particularly when I went to the Lord's supper, as I used to do twice every year, with the other young men. The day previous to attending that ordinance, I used to refrain from certain things; and on the day itself I was serious, and also swore once or twice to God, with the emblem of the broken body in my mouth, to become better, thinking that for the oath's sake I should be induced to reform. But after one or two days were over I was as bad as before.

### **Sinful Ways**

I had now grown so wicked, that I could habitually tell lies without blushing. And further to show how fearfully wicked I was, I will mention, out of many others, only one great sin, of which I was guilty, before I left this place. Through my dissipated life I had contracted debts, which I had no means of discharging; for my father could allow me only about as much as I needed for my regular maintenance. One day, after having received a sum of money from him, and having purposely shown it to some of my companions, I afterwards feigned that it was stolen, having myself by force injured the lock of my trunk, and having also designedly forced open my guitar case. I also feigned myself greatly frightened at what had happened, ran into the director's room with my coat off, and told him that my money was stolen. I was greatly pitied. Some friends also gave me now as much money as I pretended to have lost, and the circumstance afforded me a ground upon which to ask my creditors to wait longer. But this matter turned out bitterly; for the director, having ground to suspect me, though he could not prove anything, never fully restored me to his confidence.

As regards my own feeling, though I was very wicked, yet this desperate act of depravity was too much, even for my hardened conscience; for it never afterwards allowed me to feel easy in the presence of the director's wife, who, like a kind mother, had waited on me in my illness, and on whom I had now so willfully brought trouble. How long-suffering was God at this time, not to destroy me at once! And how merciful that He did not suffer me to be tried before the police, who easily would have detected that the whole was a fabrication! I was heartily glad for many reasons, but particularly on account of this latter circumstance, to be able soon after to exchange the school for the University.

### **Enters Halle University**

I had now obtained what I had fondly looked forward to. I became a member of the University, and that with very honourable testimonials.

I had thus obtained permission to preach in the Lutheran Establishment, but I was as truly unhappy and as far from God as ever. I had made strong resolutions, now at last to change my course of life, for two reasons: first, because, without it, I thought no parish would choose me as their pastor; and secondly, that without a considerable knowledge of divinity I should never get a good living; as the obtaining of a valuable cure, in Prussia, generally depends upon the degree which the candidates for the ministry obtain in passing the examination. But the moment I entered Halle, the University town, all my resolutions came to nothing. Being now more than ever my own master, and without any control as long as I did not fight a duel, molest the people in the streets, etc., I renewed my profligate life afresh, though now a student of *divinity*. When my money was spent, I pawned my watch and a part of my linen and clothes, or borrowed in other ways. Yet in the midst of it all I had a desire to renounce this wretched life, for I had no enjoyment in it, and had sense enough left to see that the end one day or other would be miserable; for I should never get a living. But I had no sorrow of heart on account of offending God.

### Friendship with Beta

One day when I was in a tavern with some of my wild fellow-students, I saw among them one of my former schoolfellows, named Beta, whom I formerly despised, because he was so quiet and serious. It now appeared well to me to choose him as my friend, thinking that if I could but have better companions, I should improve my own conduct.

This Beta was a backslider. When formerly he was so quiet at school, I have reason to believe it was because the Spirit of God was working on his heart; but now, having departed from the Lord, he tried to put off the ways of God more and more, and to enjoy the world, of which he had known but little before. I sought his friendship, because I thought it would lead me to a steady life; and *he* gladly formed an acquaintance with me, as he told me afterwards, because he thought it would bring him into more immoral company. Thus my poor foolish heart was again deceived. And yet, God, in His abundant mercy, made him after all, in a way which was never thought of by me, the instrument of doing me good, not merely for time, but for eternity.

About this period, June, 1825, I was again taken ill in consequence of my profligate and vicious life. My state of health would therefore no longer allow me to go on in the same course, but my desires were still unchanged. About the end of July I recovered. After this, my conduct was outwardly rather better; but this arose only from want of money. At the commencement of August, Beta and I, with two other students, drove about the country, for four days. All the money for this expensive pleasure had been obtained by pledging some of our remaining articles.

## Trip to Switzerland

When we returned, instead of being truly sorry on account of this sin, we thought of fresh pleasures, and, as my love for traveling was stronger than ever, through what I had seen on this last journey, I proposed to my friends to set off for Switzerland. The obstacles in the way, the want of money, and the want of the passports, were removed by *me*. For, through forged letters from our parents, we procured passports; and through pledging all we could, particularly our books, we obtained as much money as we thought would be enough. Beta was one of the party.

On August 18th we left Halle. It will be enough to say that we went as far as Mount Rigi in Switzerland. Forty-three days we were, day after day, traveling, almost always on foot. I had now obtained the desire of my heart. I had seen Switzerland. But still I was far from being happy. The Lord most graciously preserved us from many calamitous circumstances, which, but for His gracious providence, might have overtaken us. But I did not see His hand at that time, as I have seen it since. Sickness of one or more of us, or separation from one another, which might have so easily befallen us, would have brought us, being so far from home, and having but just as much money as was absolutely needed, into a most miserable condition. I was on this journey like Judas; for, having the common purse, I was a thief. I so managed, that the journey cost me but two-thirds of what it cost my friends. Oh! How wicked was I now. At last all of us became tired of seeing even the most beautiful views; and whilst at first, after having seen certain places, I had been saying with Horace, at the end of the day, in my pagan heart, "*Vixi*" (I have lived), I was now glad to get home again.

September 29th we reached Halle, from whence each of us, for the remainder of the vacation, went to his father's house. I had now, by many lies, to satisfy my father concerning the traveling expenses, and succeeded in deceiving him. During the three weeks I stayed at home, I determined to live differently for the future. Once more the Lord showed me what resolutions come to, when made in man's strength. I was different for a few days; but when the vacation was over, and fresh students came, and, with them, fresh money, all was soon forgotten.

At this time Halle was frequented by 1,260 students, about 900 of whom studied divinity, all of which 900 were allowed to preach, although, I believe, not nine of them feared the Lord.

## Conversion

The time was now come when God would have mercy upon me. His love had been set upon such a wretch as I was before the world was made. His love had sent His Son to bear punishment on account of my sins, and to fulfil the law which I had broken times without number. And now at a time when I



was as careless about Him as ever, He sent His Spirit into my heart. I had no Bible, and had not read in it for years. I went to church but seldom; but, from custom, I took the Lord's supper twice a year. I had never heard the gospel preached up to the beginning of November, 1825. I had never met with a person who told me that he meant, by the help of God, to live according to the Holy Scriptures. In short, I had not the least idea that there were any persons really different from myself, except in degree.

One Saturday afternoon, about the middle of November, 1825, I had taken a walk with my friend Beta. On our return he said to me that he was in the habit of going on Saturday evenings to the house of a Christian, where there was a meeting. On further enquiry he told me that they read the Bible, sang, prayed, and read a printed sermon. No sooner had I heard this, than it was to me as if I had found something after which I had been seeking all my life long. I immediately wished to go with my friend, who was not at once willing to take me; for knowing me as an immoral young man, he thought I should not like this meeting. At last, however, he said he would call for me. I would here mention that Beta seems to have had conviction of sin, and probably also a degree of acquaintance with the Lord, when about fifteen years old. Afterwards, being in a cold and worldly state, he joined me in that sinful journey to Switzerland. On his return, however, being extremely miserable, and convinced of his guilt, he made a full confession of his sin to his father; and, whilst with him, sought the acquaintance of a Christian brother, named Richter. This Dr. Richter gave him, on his return to the University, a letter of introduction to a believing tradesman, of the name of Wagner. It was this brother in whose house the meeting was held.

We went together in the evening. As I did not know the manners of believers, and the joy they have in seeing poor sinners even in any measure caring about the things of God, I made an apology for coming. The kind answer of this dear brother I shall never forget. He said: "Come as often as you please; house and heart are open to you." We sat down and sang a hymn. Then brother Kayser, afterwards a Missionary in Africa in connection with the London Missionary Society, who was then living at Halle, fell on his knees, and asked a blessing on our meeting. This kneeling down made a deep impression upon me; for I had never either seen any one on his knees, nor had I ever prayed myself on my knees. He then read a chapter and a printed sermon; for no regular meetings for expounding the Scriptures were allowed in Prussia, except an ordained clergyman was present. At the close we sang another hymn, and then the master of the house prayed. Whilst he prayed, my feeling was something like this: I could not pray as well, though I am much more learned than this illiterate man. The whole made a deep impression on me. I was happy; though if I had been asked why I was happy, I could not have clearly explained it.

When we walked home, I said to Beta, "All we have seen on our journey to Switzerland, and all our former pleasures, are as nothing in comparison with this evening." Whether I fell on my knees when I returned home, I do not remember; but this I know, that I lay peaceful and happy in my bed. This shows that the Lord may begin His work in different ways. For I have not the least doubt that on that evening He began a work of grace in me, though I obtained joy without any deep sorrow of heart, and with scarcely any knowledge. That evening was the turning point in my life. The next day, and Monday, and once or twice besides, I went again to the house of this brother, where I read the Scriptures with him and another brother; for it was too long for me to wait till Saturday came again.

Now my life became very different, though all sins were not given up at once. My wicked companions were given up; the going to taverns was entirely discontinued; the habitual practice of telling falsehoods was no longer indulged in, but still a few times after this I spoke an untruth. At the time when this change took place, I was engaged in translating a novel out of French into German for the press, in order to obtain the means of gratifying my desire to see Paris. This plan about the journey was now given up, though I had not light enough to give up the work in which I was engaged, but finished it. The Lord, however, most remarkably put various obstacles in the way and did not allow me to sell the manuscript. At last, seeing that *the whole* was wrong, I determined never to sell it, and was enabled to abide by this determination. The manuscript was burnt.

I now no longer lived habitually in sin, though I was still often overcome, and sometimes even by open sins, though far less frequently than before, and not without sorrow of heart. I read the Scriptures, prayed often, loved the brethren, went to church from right motives, and stood on the side of Christ, though laughed at by my fellow students.

What all the exhortations and precepts of my father and others could not effect; what all my own resolutions could not bring about, even to renounce a life of sin and profligacy; I was enabled to do, constrained by the love of Jesus. The individual who desires to have his sins forgiven, must seek for it through the blood of Jesus. The individual who desires to get power over sin, must likewise seek it through the blood of Jesus.

– GEORGE MÜLLER