

HARRIS

70 Canterbury Rd.  
Ronswood,  
WORCESTER,  
WR5 1PN.

17 10 83.

Dear Dr. Mayall,

The papers you are looking for, which were my memories of my early life, are 4 or 5 sheets, possibly 6, (I can't remember exactly) as this I'm using here. I do hope you are able to trace them, as, although I have promised to do my memories again for the sake of this project you are engaged upon, yet it would be done reluctantly as concentration is difficult when one is 80 years of age.

I've been thinking, to get an idea of the orphanage and people's attitude towards orphans in the earlier Victorian periods you could do worse by not acquainting your good self with the life of George Muller, and the building of the orphan houses. The Institution of the Orphanage was known as the New Orphan Houses in deference to the two earlier attempts to take a compassionate attitude towards the hoards of homeless children he saw around him. There was much opposition to the kids, and the good people of the time objected to noise and games of children at play, and it annoyed them. One condition of admission was that the orphan was born in wedlock, and certificates had to be furnished in proof.

Mullers was divided into 5 "Houses" and cared for 2,000 + children. Girls were kept till they were 17, but boys left at 14 years of age. Boys and girls were kept rigorously apart. Houses No. 1 and 4 were used for boys and 2 3 and 5 for girls. Even brothers and sisters never came into contact at all. My own sisters (whom I did not know, I never even met until I came back to Birmingham in 1917 when I left the Homes.

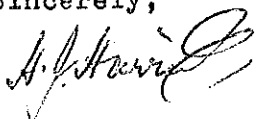
I think it necessary that, with the Dickensian view people have, a truer picture is made. For instance, young Oliver would not have taken his basin and asked for more. To use a slang word of my times, he wouldn't have had the mallow, (meaning, he wouldn't have had the pluck plus occasion/opportunity) as our meals were already laid out before we marched into the dining room, and we took our "established" place at table. And all meals were taken in ABSOLUTE silence. Dare anyone make the least sound, during meals.

Besides our ordinary school programme we were assigned various chores, We scrubbed floors, washed down paintwork, made beds and emptied chambers, etc. And also, we dug spuds, and heeled in cabbages, and the like. We knitted socks and sewed on our buttons. We made tables and forms to sit on. We mended shoes, or boots, as no one wore shoes in those days. I don't know what the girls did, other than the usual girlish jobs, making clothes and cooking. Oh, they worked in the nursery and in the infirmary, too. They waited at table for the upper echelons of the establishment.

We had no games, Indeed such activities were frowned upon as worthless frivolities. But our House overlooked the Gloucester Cricket grounds and we cast wondering eyes to see what was going on, (when no one was about) Oh SIN!

We had our own swimming bath, however, and even went to Kingdown Swimming Bath to show off our abilities in Resuscitating the Apparently Drowned, and giving examples of how we could rescue a person in difficulty while in deep water.

Well, I'll have to close, as I've run out of paper,  
Yours Sincerely,

 H J Harris

EXCERPT

113

70 Canterbury Rd. Ronkswood,  
Worcester, WR5 1PN.

18.6.78.

Ref yours 30.5.78. JA/VJR.

Professor John Burnett, MA.  
Brunell University, Uxbridge,  
Middlesex,

Dear Sir,

I note, with some pleasure, that you are going to give thought of including my story' in your forthcoming book. Of course, you have my agreement to publish anything I say or write in my communications with you. The very fact that I have written such that is in my letters to you freely and without any prompting from you, is your property from the time you receive the letters. That is my tacit thought as I compose any letter, to ANYONE.

But, Sir, you have not had my FULL account of the subject I understood your good self to be interested in! I did think, however, that you were indeed fortunate, to have ME as a listener, on that particular day, as Woman's Hour is not my top programme by any means. Besides this, it happens to come immediately AFTER that most boring of programmes "The Archers" which, if anything would induce me to commit suicide, it would be that particular programme. I weighed it up thus; if anyone can give any account of ATTITUDES and MODES of thought of the 7th. Edwardian and early 5th. Georgian days, they would now, either be in heaven, singing Hallelujahs to their King, or stoking up for Lucifer, for eternity. (According to whom they served during their sojourn in life.) There may be others about too, who like me, are granted extra time "for injuries" but many of them might only be found in some geriatric wards, or if they have some fortune hid away somewhere, looked after by relatives who have, belatedly, "started to care". I know, nowadays, everybody seems anxious to adopt some poor little orphan. In MY days, I cannot ever recall anyone wishing to care for us, and there were TWO THOUSAND of us at Ashley Down! But we were the lucky ones, (so they always kept telling us) On Tuesday afternoons, when the orphan snake wended its way from No. 4 House, through the streets of Bristol, (all of us, looking unhappy and miserable) we saw lots of pale children about. Dirty and unkempt, maybe they all wore black socks, or did their bodies require scrubbing? One thing which is certain, no-one could tell if OUR legs were clean or not! Ours were covered with corduroy trousers. Another thing, as small and as frail as we may have appeared we were a little bigger than many kids of our own age, (we wore heavy boots which must have made us, at least three-eighths of an inch taller! They didn't wear anything on THEIR feet. As we progressed along, people would come out and stare, for Muller's Orphanage was indeed considered "A modern miracle" I remember, during the 1st. World War, people actually asked to be allowed to shelter in the orphanage grounds if a Zeppelin came to Bristol to unload its bombs.

I hope you will use my story, I have my own reason/s for this desire. Since my retirement I have been trying to find out something of my origins (without much success,) It is just that someone would be able to trace where and when my father was born, and this recount of my early days might inspire someone to give me some help in this matter.

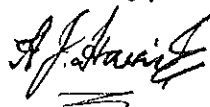
Well I'll now close, but if you would like any more, please do write and let me know.

OVER.

If however you have had enough to go on with, I won't be offended if you say so, whatever terms you may couch it in.

Good luck to your book. I hope no-one will describe it as "awful". Let me tell you why I say that. -- A lady tried to sympathise with me in my plight of homelessness, so she sheltered me for a few days. She fussed about a little too fussily, I thought, and I was not used to being cared for. One day one of her daughters got into a violent argument with a neighbour. Mrs. Waters (who was a war widow) expecting me to intervene in the dispute, asked me what I thought of Olive, I replied from what I have learned of the girl "She was MOST AWFUL. That finished it. From then on my name was Mud. I had to go out of her presence with the utmost speed. I hadn't meant to give any offence, but on the contrary, Most AWFUL simply meant WONDERFUL provoking adoration. After all was not Chris Wren's plans for St. Pauls Cathedral so chosen because they were the MOST AWFUL submitted. I know better now, but I didn't then.

Yours sincerely,



H J Harris, .

May 4, 1978.

70 Canterbury Rd.  
Ronkswood, WORCESTER, WR5 1PN.

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Professor John Barnett.  
Uxbridge, Middx.

Dear Professor,

I am glad you are going to consider my account of Social Conditions in the pre- Myra Curtis Report days. I am enclosing with this letter my contribution to your researches. I wish to make it clear that I have not exaggerated nor embellished my story in any way whatever. Everything is factual. I may be accused that much of what I have said is under-stressed. But I have put it this way because although they have been my experiences, they may not have been universal.

In the account I have referred to my master Mr McWhirk saying that my mother was a very wicked woman. I can explain just what his reasoning would be to make him talk in that way. If you feel you would like that given, I will do so, if you would make a rule that that information is not communicated to anyone else, except just obliquely, I have also said that there was some condemnation of my mother when I went to Small Heath Police Station, and told them that I was destitute and had nowhere to go. That too, I can give you the official way my father met his death, but you would have to accept my word for what I discovered was rumoured and believed about the whole affair. You know, even now I have pangs of anguish and depression when I give thought to the story.

You may find many words missed out or misspelt. Put that down to the fact that my brain operates at a vastly greater speed than does my finger in finding the proper key on this typewriter! But I hope you can make something of my effort, and it will be one story in your researches for publication. I hope you get others a bit more cheerful reading, just to balance it all out.

There are many incidents I have purposely omitted: Mainly because they would add nothing to your searches and needn't have been if I had not have been I.

I have not attempted to say anything about the idiosyncrasies of the teachers or masters, as people today have various funny traits just as they did at Müllers in my days. All I know now that Squeers was a Christian compared. And even Dickens didn't have a monopoly in funny characters, only we never laughed at them, as their 'jokes' were usually at our discomfort.

I shall look forward to hearing whether you find my epistle worthy of consideration in your proposed Social History Early 20th. Century.

Yours sincerely,

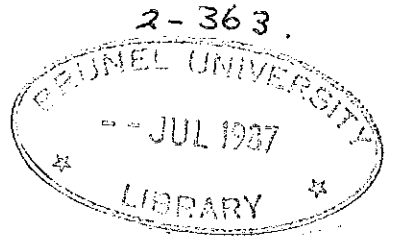
*H. J. Harris*

H J Harris. (H)

*over.*

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70 Canterbury Rd.  
Ronkswood,  
WORCESTER WR5 1PN.



April 18 1978.

Professor John Barnett

*oral*

Dear Professor

I was listening in to Woman's Hour this afternoon and heard you say you would be interested in hearing from those whose school-days were in the early part of this century. I am responding to say that I was brought up in an orphanage where I was placed in 1906 till 1917.

I have often tried to write about my experiences, but my hands are very shaky, that my writing becomes illegible, (and I am only a one-fingered typist too). But I feel my story ought to be recorded for posterity even as a textbook on psychiatry illustrating "How NOT to bring up a child" And, also for showing how the under privileged were treated in the Edwardian days.

If you would like me to tell my story I'd only be too pleased to relate it to you. It was an Institution closed completely to the outside world. So when the time for me to leave, I was thrown out into a strange world of which I knew nothing at all. Something like a Tarzan. Everywhere I went as I was a laughing-stock, speaking correctly and grammatically, but knowing none of idiomatic forms of speech. Bewildered and bemused in a very quaint way. I was terribly frightened and uncertain that I had a mental breakdown which even to-day still effects me.

I regret there would be no happy ending, and things did not work out right in the end, as so many stories of adversity do.

Would my story be of interest to you? Please let me know, and I will do give you it as briefly as I am able.

Yours truly

H. J. Harris (Mr)

70 Canterbury Road  
Ronkswood, Worcester. WR5 1PN.

Dear David Mayall,  
Thanks for your letter of January 23. Willingly, I will explain how life in a Victorian Orphanage could be paralleled to what I experienced in a lunatic asylum. (Notice I said lunatic Asylum, NOT mental hospital!)

In the early thirties I was committed to an asylum. I found the routine quite similar to what I had been used to 20 or so years before. We were counted in and counted out whenever we were to leave the permitted areas and were required to go "en masse" with a master or at least a "monitor" who would be responsible for us, and good behaviour at all times. Besides, the regimen from the bell that got us out of bed in the mornings, when we dressed stripped back our beds, formed into a line and marched down stairs to the common assembly room. We took our places, those who had wetted the bed had to stand out, which we did with a hang-drawn expression, as it was considered very dirty and was put down to laziness and objectionable behaviour, and so punished by cold douches and deprivation of any playtime for the rest of that day. The "clean" orphans took their places and were sent in relays to the washroom. We washed head, neck and body down to the waist, and had to go in front of the master to show ourselves well scrubbed and lathered. By this time, it would be about 7 o'clock. As we were Scripture Union members we read aloud and in turns a verse of the Bible reading for that particular day. Then after a break of a  $\frac{1}{4}$  hour we formed up again to march into the dining room. The breakfast was always the same, porridge (except Sundays when we had bread and butter and skimmed milk) After breakfast there was a service which usually lasted till nine. Then we all settled on our various tasks, bed making party, sweeping groups, chamber pot emptiers, etc. We all had jobs to do. Just as in an asylum we all had to work on cleaning or on the farm, and to do everything under supervision all the time.

At ten the schoolday started and the morning session went on till  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 12. At 1 o'clock was the dinner bell and again we formed up and were marched into dinner., which was followed by another service (or prayer meeting) and at  $\frac{1}{4}$  to two we went out to play until 2.30. and then in to school until 4.30 pm. after half an hours play we went into tea. We had another hour-and half school after tea, and finally going to bed at 9.30 after sing an evening hymn and a prayer. Such was our day. Sundays the usual hours for school were spent Scripture reading and discussion on any particular lesson to be gleaned from the perusal of any particular Scripture lesson throughout the week just passed. Of course, Lunatic Asylums do not now exist, Mental Hospitals are quite different. In these places there is some attempt at CURE, but in LAs it was taken that there was NO cure, and none was attempted, except that bad teeth, tonsils, adenoids and such were removed, but other than that you were given up, as incurable. Freud and Jung were just beginning to make an impact on the psychiatric scene but nothing was done at the two places I was consigned to. But on the third occasion they went all out for it. We got ECT, (some leucotomy) and all kinds of treatments, but alas, when the damage is too great and deep laid, I'm afraid its all to no avail. I'm 80 now, CURE should come within the next decade I think. We live in hope, but die in despair. Oh, dear!

I bet you'll be glad when I shut up, or rambling on like this, But forgive, its my condition.

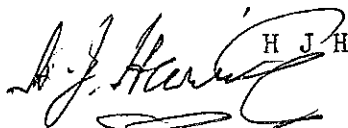
Forgive me for being such a curmudgeon. I ought to be thanking my former

benefactors. At least, they acted according to their lights and thought they were protecting me. And I know this, there were many worse off who would have liked to have enjoyed the "wealth" that obtained inside the walls of Mullers. Poverty was really appalling, scraggy children with nothing on their feet. You can look at all the Oxfam pictures and adverts. such was common in the early years of this century IN ENGLAND! I've seen it!

By the way, If you make use of any particular in my letters please write it in your own style. I'm no author, or I'd have written a book long long ago.

Anything else you'd like to know about Social history in the early part of this century ask me, I can tell you. Workhouse life Mental hospital life Life as a tramp. Yes that's been my experience. "On the knocker" Loitering with intent . Kind English People, they'd see you starve and show all kinds of sympathy (except the proper sort)

Yours respectfully,

 H J Harris.

Jan 30. 1984

20. 3. 79.

Note letter commentary  
Additional data

EXTRACT

70 Canterbury Road, Ronkswood,  
Worcester WR5 1PM.

John Burnett M.A., LL.B. Ph.D.  
Professor of Social History

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Dear Sir,

Ref. yours dated 30 May, 1978, JB/VJR.

If you would like me to fill in a few more details to my story I am willing to do so. I agree that you may consider my story too depressing as to be unbelievable, but I assure you that it is absolutely true in every detail, and I purposely put in quite a lot of reference points so that it can be checked by anyone wishing to prove otherwise.

Now, Sir, as my description of Life in an Orphanage in the early decades of this century seems to be very depressing, I would like to tell you of some of the reliefs, which though trivial judged by today's standards, were greatly appreciated by us inmates.

There was, once a year, the "Out-all-day" It was that for one whole day in the height of summer, we were told that on a certain day we were going out for the day to be spent on a field (about 2 miles or so from the school). The whole of the orphanage population would set out on foot to PUR DOWN. We could spend the day as we wished, and have a good time picking buttercups and making daisy chains. Our midday meal that day we took with us, and consisted of a slice of bread (cut a little thicker than usual) and a piece of cheese. There was an apple for some, and an orange for others, but you couldn't have both. Teatime came, but the fare was that peculiar to the particular day it happened to be.

What the "Out-all-day" seems in retrospect was one long incessant service, only differing from the usual by the slight relax of the discipline associated with our religious performances, we could wander away or join in as we liked. AND we DID enjoy that immensely. Another thing that made that day so pleasant was that we could really stay out until eight o'clock in the evening before we were formed up and marched back to the School.

Another fond memory I store is the Christmas celebrations. Our school was very bleak and spartan. There was no decoration and no covering on the floors which were kept clean by hard scrubbing regularly, that the Xmas decorations made it look quite comforting and pleasant. I told you that there were 5 houses, and that usually one did not go out of one's own house to visit another, At Christmas we would go to first one house to view their decorations, one one day and another house on another day, until each house had visited the five houses of the community. We would sing carols (that we had specially learned, for this occasion) Each had a different set of carols to sing. On Christmas day we would have some Christmas pudding instead of usual dinner and for tea we would be allowed extra bread AND JAM! instead of what might be usual for that particular day. We had quite a lot to be grateful for. (So different to "today's children, who are perhaps spoilt by having their every need supplied to saturation. I often think, a little hardship might make them more appreciative of the things that society has put into their lap, and without even deserving it, too!)

Sir, I really do hope you will be able to include my memoirs in your proposed book. I shall only be too willing to explain anything or expand on any detail, so please let me know. And Sir, please let me know when your book may be bought, as I myself, would like a copy.

Caroleaf



By the way, the name I am using now, and have used for several years is not the name I was known by at the Orphanage. The staff at Muller's Homes (the successors to Muller's Orphan Houses) are aware of my change of name, which circumstances made desirable.

Again, I repeat, I am willing to give you any explanation of how Charity Schools were run, when there was no social security and NOBODY cared! We lived on a shoe-string, and there was no room for waste in ANY direction.

I hope you find this my account interesting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "H. J. Harris". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Mr. H. J. Harris.

113

70 Canterbury Road,  
Ronkswood,  
WORCESTER, WR5 1PN.

John Burnett, Professor of Social History.  
School of Social Sciences,  
Uxbridge University, Middlesex.

Dear Sir,

In former correspondence, I have inadvertently misspelt your name, and now wish to apologise.

I was wondering whether you found the synopsis of my story of life in an orphanage, and the ultimate effect such experiences had on my personality in the ensuing years long after I had left the place, of any significance?

There was much that I had left unsaid, as I tried to keep to the 4 or 5 thousand words, as you requested. Besides, I would not be able to put it all in any interesting way, and would require someone to rephrase the story so that any melancholia I may be suffering from when recounting the past, did not impinge on the message and lesson, to students of Social History.

As I did not receive any acknowledgement that you had had the extract which I posted to Uxbridge University during the first week in May, could you let me have some indication that you are still interested in what I have to say? Of course, whether you make use of it or not, you are the best judge. All I can say, is that the Homes that it was my misfortune to spend my early years at, may not be typical of ALL charity institutions, of that period.

Yours sincerely,

*H. J. Harris*

H. J. Harris.

June 2, 1978.

LETTERS CROSSED

— No reply needed.

3 May, 1978.

70 Canterbury Rd. Ronkswood,  
Worcester, WR5 1PN.

Professor John Barnett,  
Uxbridge, Middx.

Dear Professor,

I am glad you are to give consideration to my story and experiences.

The orphanage I was at is (or was) known as The New Orphan Houses, Ashley Down, Bristol. But by most people it was simply called Müller's Orphanage. Now the buildings have been taken over by the Bristol Corporation and used as a Polytechnic or something.

There were 5 very large buildings, which housed some 2,000 orphans. Some boys in No. 1 House and about 400 in No. 4 House. The other three houses were all girls. We wore a distinctive dress. The boys wore heavy boots (which were polished with blacking). Grey socks, which we had to knit ourselves, corduroy trousers, and a black "melton cloth" coat which fastened up to the neck, and finished with a neck-band, over which the shirt collar turned. The headgear was a peaked hat (like a soldiers) but black.

For identification purposes, perhaps, we all had a school number. (Mine was 1250) My brother's was 1155. I suppose this was to indicate which particular Jones or Smith might be alluded to, as with a large school there was bound to be some of the same surname.

The usual regime was the same for all. At 6 o'clock in the morning we got out of bed and dressed. Then we formed a line and were marched to the main school room and took up our own places in the room. Those who wetted the bed had to stand out in front. (And, woe betide any who so defaulted by not so doing.) The "clean" boys did Bible reading, while so many at a time went to the wash house to perform their ablutions. They had to strip down to the waist and thoroughly lather all over, hair and all, then when they had done this to the master's satisfaction, swill off (we would dip our heads into the buckets, provided for the purpose, and then dry on the long roller towels. Then the next batch would come in until everyone had had their mornings wash.

The bed wetters were treated differently. For then it was a cold douche usually. He had to sit in a wooden bath and have the pump water directed down his back, until the master thought he had punished him enough. Then he was not allowed out to play for the rest of the day.

When ablutions were finished we then went out of the school main room and were supposed to be playing, but everybody was so miserable that all we did was to stand around like zombies, and wait for the breakfast bell, which was at eight o'clock.

We formed up for breakfast and were marched in to the dining room. We had a short service, and then we could sit down for breakfast, which consisted of a "tin" basin of porridge with a dash of milk on it. We were always so hungry that we would eat it in such a way that the mould it had formed in the basin LEFT THE BASIN CLEAN! In any case then would be about half a litre, so there was none to waste.

Before we left the dining room there was another service of longer duration than the one before breakfast.

After breakfast, all the boys had various house duties to perform. There was the floors to be scrubbed, or the night slops to be emptied, Nearly every child had some task to do, and as the floor was bare boards there was quite a lot of scrubbing (all on hands and knees, and lathered for inspection before the soap was swilled off, and dried off with a floor cloth.

At 10, all housework was supposed to be finished, and the bell rang again for school to commence. Each year pupils had the same master for all lessons. My school master was one Mr. McWhirk. The curriculum was the same throughout the whole orphanage. First hour reading aloud. Each had his own reader and read in turns throughout the class. If he made any mistake, either in pronunciation or emphasis it was up to any other chap to stop him and draw attention to what he thought a mistake. The teacher was the final arbiter. Then the pupil would have to read his paragraph again but correct the "mistake".

There was parsing and analysing of sentences, essay writing, pré-cising and reporti-

ing a speech in another person. An hour every day was given over to Arithmetic. At 1pm. We formed up again and marched in for dinner. Dinners were always the same for a particular day.

Mondays was always Potatoes (steamed in their jackets) brawn, and cabbage or peas. Tuesdays, Thick stew. (about half a litre)

Wednesdays, as for Mondays,

Thursdays Thin stew and a slice of bread.

Fridays Rice and treacle. The same tin basin holding somewhat less than a pint.

Saturdays, as for Mondays and Wednesdays.

Sundays A basin of rice with raisins.

The afternoons were occupied by us boys knitting our own socks and doing some clothing repairs.

There was school from 2 to 4pm. then half an hour free time and a wash then brought us up to tea time which consisted of, Mondays and Wednesdays, two rounds of bread and treacle, Tuesdays and Thursdays -- dripping was substituted for the treacle. Saturday, we sometimes got bread and butter or some kind of salt cooked meat. (I am unable to identify exactly what this stuff was, but nobody liked it and would hide it away and get rid of it later. The drink served with tea was always buttermilk. About a large cupful. As the water used at the orphanage was all well water, perhaps that was the reason we were not allowed to drink water, except that that was put on the tables at dinner time.

There was no games or sports of any kind, but we did a lot of Swedish drill, and also Indian Climb drill. We had our own swimming bath too, which in summer we would be taken down in organised groups.

Once a week we would go for a walk, (snake formation) but were encouraged to look "downcast" as we were a charity school and the thoughts that people might see how well we appeared to be doing might discourage their sympathies!

Once a year we had an "out-all-day" this was the only day of the year the children from one house would see the children from the other houses.

I had Two brothers and two sisters who were also at the orphanage. My two sisters left in 1910. When I had to leave, there was nowhere to send me, and the authorities said I was not suitable to be put to a trade as I was a bed-wetter, and therefore classed as an unsociable person. So in 1917 when I left I was sent to live with my sisters (who themselves, were in lodgings). Now I had NEVER before seen my sisters nor they, me. So the arrangement was for me to travel to Birmingham and as an identifying mark I was to wear a white handkerchief in my coat pocket with it half hanging out and also have a bible in my hand, standing by my trunk, as I stood on the platform All this so that my sister would recognise her own brother. When we met, she said Are you Bert, have you come from Bristol?

My sister said she could not take me to live at her lodgings as there was no room for any more lodgers, but she had arranged for me to live with her landlady's mother. So she took me there. At the next weekend my sisters' landlady came to see her mother. But what she must have told her about me, I cannot even guess, but one thing I know I couldn't stay there any longer. She (Mrs. Lusty) told me she might be able to squeeze me in with her for a day or so, but I really must go out and do some work. She made a "bed" up for me in the bath, by putting some sacks in as a mattress, and I could sleep in my clothes. It was war-time and there was the "Cover Lights" law in operation. So when she gave me a candle I was so conscious of the candle light showing That I tried to shield the light from outside so I put a Text Card to stop the light showing outside. Then someone popped into the bathroom to see what was going on and then went out again. The draught from the door blew the Text Card from its place and onto the candle flame. In fear of what such a light would do I panicked, and grabbed the flaming card and pushed it into the bath, intending to turn the tap on it. But the fear of wetting what was to be my bed, I tried to stifle the flame by smothering it by stamping on it, The consequent smoke and smell alarmed the whole house and I was told I must leave Mrs Lusty's house in the morning.

Thus I was "on my own" in every sense of the word! Homeless and without friends and knowing no-one. Further to this I soon found that I could not understand many of the things that were said to me as I would be confounded by ungrammatical phrases and such sayings as I'll see you just now. The words "just now" to me meant IMMEDIATELY. I would interpret everything word for word, and "just" would mean right -- now. I remember asking what a lady meant when she used the expression "So-long" and questioned what was "so long". Many misunderstandings as these caused many to doubt my sanity.

I well remember that day June 27 1917. I had left Bristol only 7 days before. At that time I did not know whether my mother was alive, I did think strange that my sisters did not mention her at all. And I recollect that the last I heard of was in 1910. She came to see me. We were only allowed "friends" to visit us on the 1st. Monday of any month. I was only 7 years of age then and my class master, Mr McWhirk stayed and talked with my mother far more than I could do so. Then, again, because all letters to us and from us were censored, and anything likely to cause "any distress" was CUT out or otherwise blacked out completely. The opinion that Mr McWhirk formed of my mother must have been very very bad indeed, as often afterwards he would say my mother was a very bad woman, who has brought the family to what it is I thought of all this as I worried and pondered about the situation I was in. Most of that day I sat on a seat in Small Heath Park (Birmingham) but when the time for the park to close I pushed my trunk containing my belongings along a hedge and walked out. Shortly after this a policeman asked me what I was loitering about for. I told him I had nowhere to live and that I had left an orphanage a week before, but had been turned out because I had nearly caused a fire, at my place of lodgings. I was then taken to Small Heath Police Station and given a mug of cocoa and some bread and butter. But after that one of the policemen asked me how old I was. So I told him that I was 14, and that I did have my birthcertificate with my trunk which I left in Small Heath Park. I went with him and he opened the gate to the park, and I then retrieved my trunk. He stared at me as he read my birth certificate. Then he turned to me and said he knew all about my case. What and how my father died. It seems that I was the natural product of such a family! I do not use the family name now, but the case was still being talked about some 14 years after. He told me that my mother had to be put away and was never likely to be let out again.

I was advised to go to Winson Green Workhouse, and I did for about four days, when I left to go and live in The Gordon Boys' Working home, at Deritend, (Birmingham) I was found a job, sorting out old rags and baling up old metal scrap. But I was worked so hard, and being physically weak I found I couldn't stop at such work. I was classed as a "work-shy" and turned out of the Home. I had a little money by this time as I would never spend anything except absolutely necessary. I stayed at a Doss House (2d. a night) my fellow acquaintances were ex jail birds and a real motley cross section of the underworld. And it is with one of these that I started life as a tramp. He taught me how to snare rabbits and steal eggs from farms stealthily and without disturbing the dogs or other farm animals. We would join fairs and although I never quite managed it, he was quite good at "short-changing" the clients (especially, if they were drunk). We would sleep out under the stars when it was fine or not too cold, and beg for an odd copper to save for a nights doss. Sometimes we stayed at Casual wards if near a town and we wanted a bath. Sometimes I would use my skill at patching or darning for the price of a meal from other dossers. I was vulnerable as a baby, and was grateful for such favours he showered me with. From Birmingham we tramped anywhere as did many people in the early 20s. Only once did we get caught doing what we shouldn't be doing. We had worked our way up to Scotland and stayed at a place known as the Trades' Hotel in Ayr. then we were right down on our luck, we couldn't scrounge anything so we decided to break into a house which we did on our way going to New Galloway we stopped at Dalmelington, and with our spoils decided to spend the night at Dalry We were roused from our sleep and taken to Kirkcudbrightshire. We got a month in prison. After that we separated, while I made my way back to Carlisle and was picked up for loitering with intent. I was let off this time, and advised to find work. (Something impossible in those days as everybody was at that time looking for work.

While I was at the Police Station at Small Heath (mentioned above) it seems that my mother's brother was once in the Police force and they connected me with the events which it was believed he had some connection with. This uncle George Hill was instrumental in our whole family going to Bristol, on the tragic circumstances of my father's death. I learned that he was not now in the force but had left on getting married. From what I gathered at that time he was now a Cinema manager in Sunderland. So I set out to try and trace him, there. So on the tramp using all I knew about tramping and roughing it I went right across Hadrian's Wall to that town. But I shouldn't have bothered as we I did see him he said "You've got yourself in trouble, get yourself out of it!"

And so it was, a life of roughing it, getting what I could honestly and stealing what couldn't be got in any other way. My health by this time was in a very bad condition. I used to suffer fainting fits and black-outs and so when my tramping brought me to London I was advised to go to the Maudsley Hospital (Denmark Hill) but I was said to be a paranoid schizophrenic. and because my roots were in Birmingham could not be admitted to a London Hospital. I made my way back to Birmingham but instead of seeking medical care which I knew I required, I managed to get a job. I was a garage labourer at James Booth, Nechells, Birmingham. I was always regarded as a bit queer, but they thought harmless. One day the garage formen came to me and asked me to accompany Tom (a lorry driver) to deliver some 3 tons of special steel to a firm at Smethwick, Mansell Booth & Co. (No connection with the firm I worked for, only business) It was one of those November days, with a drizzle and half fog all day. Besides this the metal was thick with oil and the firm happened to be along a very narrow passage which had two or three turns before you got to the place of delivery. When I did eventually get inside the place with the metal one person said that's Special, stack it here, then another suggested No, It's got to be put in there. Presently the boss, himself came and said yet another place, Well, I don't know what happened then, but I found that he had taken the metal from me and forbade me to deliver any more, but sent his own men out to take the steel in. He reported something to my firm which resulted in my summary dismissal, It seems I then went berserk and that evening I was picked up from my lodgings and found myself in Hollymoor Mental Hospital. This was in the early Thirties. Since then I have been in and out of mental hospitals many times. On two occasions, as a depressive and attempted suicide.

In 1938 I joined the territorials (after Munich, with the corresponding call of National Defence. I was, of course, called up at the outbreak of war, but after one month was discharged, as a person of unsound mind. At the time of Munich, I was in a job, working at the Nuffield Mechanizations and Aero Co. of Washford Heath at Birmingham. I had bluffed my way into a job, by learning to read a micrometer, and then I went as an engineering inspector. The pay was very good, as I was in a category higher than an apprenticed engineer. I managed to hold this job down. Having saved up some money, my next concern was to get a more permanent home. I saved the £10 required by the builders "Jones and Croxford" and laid this deposit on a house in Sheldon. There I went in to live without even a chair, or a bed. After all, I had often slept even without a roof, so this was no hardship. One day, strolling along the Stratford Road I came across an advert. in a shop window. A woman would like to meet a gent with a view to friendship. I enquired about this and made arrangements to meet her. The woman was in a shocking state of health. Unkempt, bad teeth, wizened in appearance and in a very distressed condition. But my only thought was to have someone to cook and do for me, whereas in return she could have free somewhere to live. Soon after I found she was pregnant (I swear, NOT by me.) but I could not turn her out then and so was in duty and decency bound to marry her. She has turned out to be a good and loyal friend. But her health still gives me cause for concern. I have always accepted her daughter as my own child, and wouldn't dare to suggest what I know to be the truth to the daughter.

One thing that makes me difficult to get on with is that I am prone to use words not in common use among those I associate with. I have no way of making myself understood and the "tone" of is voice is quaintly pitched for every day speech and conversation.

By the way, I am a long way off from the 5,000 words or so, but if you find this epistle in any way helpful to your object, perhaps you could ask a question or two or ask me to expand on any particular point which may not be clear to you. I'll never make an author! But this IS a true story, and all lived by me.

*If you would like any more please let me know. I do not mind your publishing any part or all if you like.*

*H. J. Harris*

H. J. HARRIS.

ADDENDUM. The whole of my story is purposely made as sketchily as possible, because I do not know exactly what particular aspects you may find of greatest interest. As far as the Orphanage every-day routine is concerned, I could perhaps have expanded more. But then one day was like any other. There was no variety at all. We were never allowed any contact with anyone from the outside world. Any visitors were conducted round the school by a master, and, if, by chance any child was asked any question the master would always stand by, and explain or enlarge, or even contradict any answer that the child gave.

Any orphan that "had visitors" (1st. Monday afternoon of the month) was treated with a kind of awe and admiration by the less fortunate, and it was generally passed round (almost with abated breath "He's got friends"! Long afterwards he was "kind of" respected by the rest as one who had friends.

There were many forms of punishment. As it was forbidden to speak while at meals The monitors would report any breach. The usual punishment was; standing facing a corner with hands one the head for an hour. Or, if a persistent offender, writing two hundred lines such as "Silence is Golden" in best copperplate handwriting. These lines had to be divided into groups of ten lines and each ten numbered. The cane was generally used for, what was termed careless school work, or any retardation in grasping any subject in the school curriculum or syllabus. Cheating (or even suspected cheating was caning across the back side. The usual "six of the best".

The school had a second name. It was known as God's Orphan Houses, and again The Institute of Knowledge. Georg Müller was a founder of The Scripture Union and we always had our daily allotted portion of the Scripture to read (and often to learn by heart) Scriptural Knowledge was accounted of far more worthy of attainment than was any other subject. Often we would have Bible quizzes (although we didn't call them that, in those days.) We were sometimes asked "out of the blue" What was the first time a "password" was used in battle? Of course it was Shibboleth which the enemy couldn't pronounce the sibilant "Sh" but would say "s" instead. Or another typical question was What was the purpose of the comfort of Abishag to King David? Believe me, Sir, when I think back on this orphanage and know what I do about inside Asylums, I would say that the former had more madmen inside than did the latter! (I ought to add here that when Müller was considering a name for his orphanage, that the word "Asylum" -- or Orphan asylum was considered but his autobiography said that this was turned

x down in deference to a nearby Lunatic Asylum. --

The boys were usually kept at the school until they were 14 years of age, but the girls, 17. Usually boys were apprenticed to a trade of their choice. The girls were trained in all kinds of Domestic work, as it was customary for them to be placed into service (with Christian families).

My two sisters, Rose and Maud, went to join mother, at her request as she said she was very lonely. They left in 1910.

My brother Frank left in 1912, also to join mother. In 1913 (?) Mother was put into an Asylum, as she (I am told) tried to commit suicide. I do not know what became of Frank, as since leaving Bristol I have NEVER again heard from him.

My brother Leslie, left the Homes in August 1914, to be apprenticed as a blacksmith, in South Wales. Later in 1917 he joined the Army as a farrier. He has had the best deal of us all. None of the family has ever been together again. I wouldn't know any of them if I saw them, nor would they know me.

I was the youngest, and left Bristol in the June (20) 1917. My experiences I have already written about.

I have purposely left unsaid anything about how I have fared since my marriage to the woman I met as a result of the Advert. in a shop window. I left the house which I had intended buying, as I evacuated my wife from Birmingham during the intense bombing, and came to Worcester. I, too, was ordered by the Ministry of Labour, acting under the Essential Works Order then in force, to work at the local ROF. (Royal Ordnance Factory) Where I stayed until the end of the war, and was employed as an Inspector. Later, living in a Ministry of Defence House, was employed as an electrician at The War Hospital here at Ronkswood. (Now a civilian hospital). In 1947 I got a job as a machine tool machine fitter, at the (now) defunct firm ARCHDALES. I stayed there until my retirement in 1968.

Today, I can truthfully say I am better off (on Social Security) than ever I've ever been in any other part of my life.

x I have missed out the word "SCRIPTURAL"  
A  
1 Insert the word 'TURNED' down in deference to.