

**EDWARD KENNAWAY GROVES  
(1836–1917):  
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>**

John Owen

Edward Kennaway Groves, was born in Madras on 11 August 1836, four weeks after his father Anthony Norris Groves had arrived from England with his new wife Harriet, a daughter of General Baynes. An entry in Norris Groves's *Memoir* records the happy event:

Madras, August 11: Tonight, in the very joy of my heart, I must write that my beloved wife has been safely confined of a dear little boy. I am quite overwhelmed at the Lord's goodness in thus bringing her so happily through her time of trial, and to feel that what I have looked forward to with anxiety these many months has hardly been other than a season of joy.<sup>2</sup>

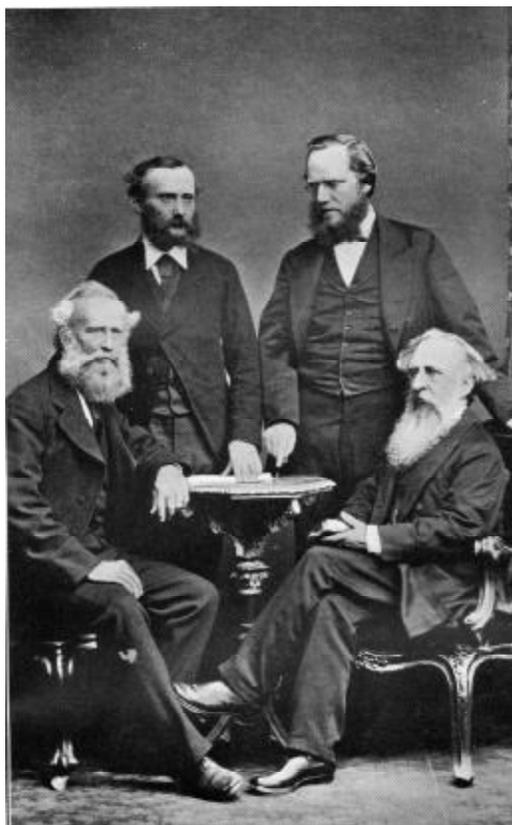
Edward's early years were spent in Chittoor,<sup>3</sup> a small town about ninety miles west of Madras (now known as Chennai), where Norris Groves was attempting to establish his first self-supporting mission station. Norris and Harriet were too involved in their labours to have much time for Edward so that his early upbringing was left to the care of the family servants, and at the age of seven and a half years old he was sent back to England, not only for the sake of his education but also for his health, the climate of India being considered unsuitable for the development of the children of Europeans.

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1. The author is grateful to Dr Robert Dann for his guidance on aspects of Edward Groves's theological beliefs, and to my former colleague, Dr Robert Cutler, for his thoughts on Edward's psychological make up.

2. [Harriet Groves (ed.)], *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves... by his widow*, 3rd edn (London, 1869), p.361.

3. Now, in 2011, Chittoor is a city in the state of Andhra Pradesh and the centre of a district with a population of over 2.5 million people.



**The Groves Brothers, c.1875**

Left to right: (standing) George and Edward (seated); Frank and Henry.

**Source:** E.K. Groves, *George Müller and his Successors* (1906), p.79.

Life for Edward over the next forty years was one of mixed fortune. First he was sent off on a voyage lasting four months to England in the care of a cane-wielding tutor to live with an aunt he had never met, and then after three reasonably happy years he was despatched to a boarding school where the curriculum was centred round twice weekly caning sessions, at which the number of strokes

administered was directly related to the number of mistakes made in reciting verses from the Bible.<sup>4</sup> When the dying Norris Groves returned to England in 1852 he took Edward to London and enrolled him at the College of Chemistry in Oxford Street, the precursor of the Royal Society of Chemistry. Six months at the college followed by an apprenticeship at the Finzel sugar refinery in Bristol prepared Edward for the role he was to play on his return to India.<sup>5</sup> After his father died in May 1853, Edward was packed off to join his stepbrothers, Henry and Frank, in running the family sugar refinery in Mysore, which was the most successful of the various ventures started by Norris Groves in his efforts to make his missionary labours financially self-supporting.

Edward enjoyed working with machinery and he became a very competent mechanical engineer, good enough to build a successful career on his own account after the family business was sold. Edward however was not at first successful in the marriage stakes and two failed engagements resulted in the first of the breakdowns that were to blight the rest of his life. The third time he was lucky and in 1864 Edward married Isabella Reeve, sister-in-law of his brother Frank, and a daughter of William Reeve, who had been missionary in India and was the author of the first English/Canarese dictionary, a publication which is still in print.<sup>6</sup> Edward and Isabella went to live on Frank's coffee plantation at Coonoor near Ootacamund in the Nilghiri Hills, in Tamil Nadu, where Edward started up in business as a repairer of agricultural machinery.<sup>7</sup> These were happy years for Edward and Isabella; their three children were born in Coonoor, and

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4. Timothy Stunt draws attention to 'the gratuitous severity of [William] Hake's educational discipline' in this school: T.C.F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain* (Edinburgh 2000), p.122 n.16.

5. [Groves (ed.)], *Memoir*, p.478. Conrad Finzel, was a friend of George Müller, and had dinner with Norris Groves at Müller's house on 26 September 1852.

6. School of Oriental and African Studies Archive [hereafter SOAS], MS 381056, J.D. Owen (ed.), Douthwaite-Groves letter archive, Appendices, p.12. See below, 'Appendix: A Note on Sources'.

7. Edward Kennaway Groves, *George Müller and his Successors* (Bristol 1906), p.151. Ootacamund (or Ooty) served as the summer capital of the Madras Presidency, much visited by the British during the colonial days. Edward's brother George was involved in building the mountain railway to Ooty in the 1890s.

his various business ventures thrived until 1872 when as a result of the Franco-Prussian war, the price of the iron Edward needed to use in his business increased to a level that rendered the manufacture of his products uneconomical. Let Edward tell in his own words how he felt:

I simply reeled under the blow that threatened bankruptcy, and again lost my sleep. How often had I misjudged my poor father for getting into debt, and how confidently I assured myself that it was possible to keep clear of it, and here I was overwhelmed. For seven years I had worked on my own account without the monthly holiday I had when serving the company. I had overcome each difficulty that crossed my path, and instead of making provision for wife and children, I was about to be ruined by circumstances altogether beyond my control.<sup>8</sup>

The symptoms of a breakdown returned and it was felt advisable for Edward to be admitted to the Presidency lunatic asylum in Madras.<sup>9</sup> On his return to Coonoor, Edward realised that it would be unwise for him to be exposed any longer to the stress of commercial life and that the time had come for him to return to England. This was a bitter blow for Edward who had carved out a valued place for himself in the thriving expatriate community around Ootacamund, and where his work was much appreciated and where for the first time in his life he was highly regarded in his own community, something for which he had long craved.

### **Edward the reformer**

When Edward arrived back in England during the summer 1874 with his wife and family, he was a tired and broken man, out of work, and short of money. Thanks to his family connections he was welcomed back into the Bristol Bethesda fellowship, where his uncle and guardian, George Müller, was all-powerful. During the twelve years

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8. Groves, *Müller*, p.76.

9. British Library India Office Records, IOR/V/23/182 No.39 1874, The Annual Report of three lunatic asylums in the Madras Presidency during 1873, Madras Govt. Press.

since Edward's previous visit to England in 1862, Bristol Bethesda had prospered and grown; starting with seven people who attended the first breaking of bread in the old Gideon Chapel in 1832, by 1874 there were more than 900 people in fellowship, divided among four chapels of which Bethesda itself had the largest congregation, and which took the lead in ecclesiastical and administrative matters. The day-to-day management of the assembly was in the hands of the oversight meeting of elders, which met every Friday evening at one of the chapels, but real power rested with a triumvirate consisting of George Müller, his deputy James Wright, and George Fred Bergin, pastor of the Bethesda Chapel. Müller's great authority derived from his achievement in establishing the Scriptural Knowledge Institution (SKI) along with the great orphanage on Ashley Down, through prayer alone. Müller's life was the ultimate example of how much a man can achieve through prayer and the closeness of his walk with God. One sentence from Müller says it all: 'I have joyfully dedicated my whole life to the object of exemplifying how much may be accomplished by prayer and faith.'<sup>10</sup> It is equally true to say that the Orphan Homes and the SKI occupied so much of his time, that although he remained the leader of the Bethesda community and insisted on leading the Sunday services, he rarely varied the content of his address and showed little or no interest in pastoral affairs.<sup>11</sup>

After his marriage to George Müller's daughter Lydia in 1872, James Wright was made the Deputy Director of the Orphan Homes and of the SKI, a post created by Müller to provide administrative cover for both organisations during his increasingly frequent overseas preaching tours.<sup>12</sup> James Wright was the ideal man for the job; he had

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10. Quoted in A.T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol* (London & Glasgow, [1899]), p.305

11. The Orphanages on Ashley Down, Bristol, evolved from an orphanage for 30 girls opened in his own home by George Müller in 1834 into an organisation caring for over 2000 children by the 1880s, the cost of which was over £1,000,000 and was raised through prayer alone. For more detail see: <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Orphan\\_Houses,\\_Ashley\\_Down,\\_Bristol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Orphan_Houses,_Ashley_Down,_Bristol)> [accessed March 2011].

12. The aims & objectives of SKI were to assist day, Sunday and adult schools in which instruction was given in Scriptural principles; to distribute Holy Scripture; and to aid missionary effort: Pierson, *Müller*, p.408.

worked closely with Müller for the previous fifteen years and understood how Müller liked things done; Wright tended to be more open and sympathetic in his dealings with people than his father-in-law; nevertheless his decisions once taken were irreversible lest vacillation were to be seen as a sign of weakness, and like Müller, Wright resisted all suggestions for change in the SKI as well as at Bethesda, where any hint of change, it was felt, might lead to deleterious consequences.

The third member of the Bethesda triumvirate was George Frederick Bergin. Bergin was an Irishman from Cork who, after a few years in business in Cardiff, came to live in Bristol where he joined the Bethesda assembly. Thanks to his business experience he attracted the attention of George Müller who was prepared to make use of this experience for the benefit of the assembly, and it was not long before he recommended Bergin for the role of pastor. Such was Müller's sway over Bethesda that the assembly had no hesitation in accepting his recommendation, and it was probably through his pastoral role that Bergin first met Edward Groves. They became firm friends and spent many evenings together discussing ways in which the fellowship at Bethesda could be improved, and one of the first needs to be identified was an update of the membership roll. From the first meetings in the old Gideon chapel the numbers in fellowship at Bethesda had increased to over 900, distributed between the main chapel and its three satellites and communication between the council of elders and the membership was poor. Edward undertook the task and had the job finished within a year, and the elders were so impressed with way he had done the job they invited him to join the Oversight meetings.

When not in the grip of his demons, Edward possessed great energy, a creative mind, obsessive attention to detail, and a compulsive need to improve any situation or organisation in which he found himself. Taking advantage of his place within the inner circle of Bethesda, Edward embarked on a programme of reforms. Within five years of his return to Bristol, Bethesda had built two new chapels, and opened four Sunday schools; there was a thriving ladies meeting at the Alma Road Chapel, there was an up-to-date

membership roll, and from initially helping four overseas missionaries, there were now forty receiving financial support from Bethesda. It would have been reasonable for Edward to expect some recognition of what had been achieved through his initiatives, but in this he was to be disappointed. Acknowledgement, praise, or expressions of appreciation from his uncle, something that Edward desperately needed, were never forthcoming, only the following comment made to his deputy James Wright: 'Dear Edward is a man of generous impulses, but he has not a particle of judgement'.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it was his lack of judgement that led Edward to challenge an organisation that was well established, with strong leadership, and which was comfortable with the way things were.

With the membership roll established, the next thing was to ensure that scriptural and administrative council policy reached every member of Bethesda, new recruits especially. Of particular concern to Edward was the number of what he termed 'Refugees from Darbyism'; these were people who had transferred their allegiance to an Open assembly as J.N. Darby's grip on the Exclusive movement weakened. Edward realised that what was needed to draw the members, old and new, into one united fellowship was a book, based on scriptural authority, which could provide a reliable account of the principles and practices of Brethrenism as applied to Bethesda. Sometime in 1879 Edward began preparing such a publication; it was to take the form of a series of conversations with a hypothetical character seeking membership of the assembly. The title of the book was *Conversations on Bethesda Family Matters*, with separate chapters being allocated to topics such as 'The Family History', 'The Family Worship', 'The Family Discipline', and 'The Family Sorrow'. It was this last chapter that was to prove most difficult; in it Edward planned to deal with the painful subject of the schism of 1848, which had led to the formation of Exclusive assemblies separated from the Open Brethren.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Groves, *Müller*, p.88.

14. Edward K. Groves, *Conversations on Bethesda Family Matters* (London [1885]); available online at: <<http://www.archive.org/stream/conversationsonb00grov#page/n0/mode/2up>> [accessed March 2011].

As Edward began to fret over this final chapter, so sleeplessness and agitation developed, and recognising the early symptoms of a breakdown, he pleaded to be allowed to go away for a complete change of scenery, but he was persuaded to take a few days rest in a local hydrotherapy hotel. This was a disaster; Edward made a fool of himself over one of the maidservants, the upshot of which was that he was certified insane and early in January 1880 he was removed to a private asylum at Northwood House near Bristol.<sup>15</sup> On the first night of his admission Edward was assaulted by one of the attendants and suffered two broken ribs. Next morning Edward was taken to see the Medical Superintendent, who dismissed his accusation of assault against the attendant and upgraded his in-patient status to that of 'Dangerous Lunatic' on the basis of grazes on the attendant's knuckles sustained when he hit Edward in the mouth. To make matters worse even after he was discharged from Northwood House, no one, including Bergin, would believe his story. This was Edward's first experience of not being believed because he was a certified lunatic, a stigma he was never to shake off.

Edward's breakdown went from bad to worse and he became so disturbed that in June 1880 he was certified insane for the third time and admitted to the Royal Bethlem Hospital in London under the care of Dr George Savage, one of the most enlightened mental health specialists of that era. Edward's recovery was slow this time and it was not until June 1881 that he was released back to the care of his family, and although welcomed back into the Bethesda fellowship, he avoided involvement in its administrative affairs for several years. There is little doubt that his standing within that community had been severely damaged, and he was never allowed to forget that he had been three times certified insane.<sup>16</sup>

For a variety of reasons Edward developed an almost pathological loathing of Exclusivism and he was deeply concerned over the

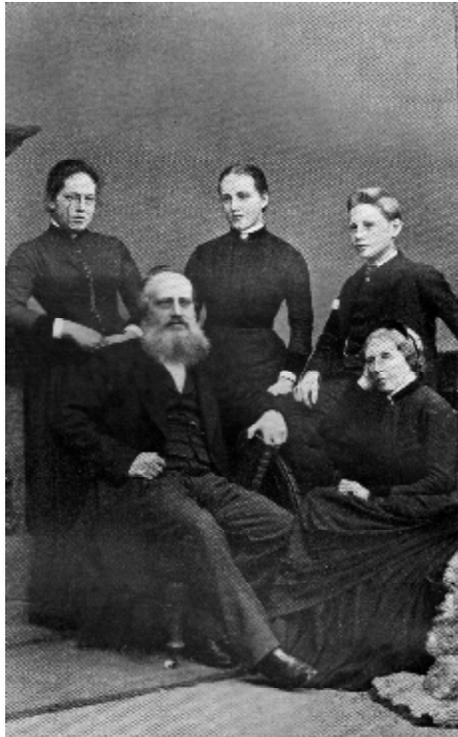
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15. Now a Ramada group hotel known as The Grange at Winterbourne, North Bristol.

16. Royal Bethlem Hospital Museum & Archive, Beckenham, Kent, hospital records relating to E.K. Groves; 23 June 1880 to 14 June 1881, <<http://www.bethlemheritage.org.uk/Archives>> [accessed March 2011].

number of ex-Exclusives in Bethesda, whose commitment to Openness he did not trust. Recovered from his breakdown, Edward finished writing *Conversations on Bethesda Family Matters*, and sought George Müller's agreement to proceed with publication. This was granted and the book was published in 1885. In view of Mr Müller's approval it was widely read throughout the Bethesda community with an initial favourable response, but as the implications of the message sank in, opinions changed and *Conversations* was considered too critical of the way things were done in Bethesda. Edward's hopes of recovering his previous status within the community dwindled. In fact the exact opposite occurred and Edward found himself being dropped from the preaching rotas and relieved of other responsibilities; to add insult to injury it soon became apparent that the detested ex-Exclusives were being preferred as preachers, because they were certain to adhere to a strictly orthodox line of teaching.

In March 1887 Edward's eldest daughter Constance went to China with the China Inland Mission, but before she left she was pressured into becoming engaged to Horace Wilson, a protégé of Edward's elder brother Henry, who had retired from India and lived in Kendal. Constance soon realised that she had made a mistake in committing herself to Wilson and she spent her first two years in China suffering agonies of doubt over her engagement, eventually becoming so depressed that she had to return home early in order to resolve the issue. Once Edward and Isabella had heard Constance's story, they



**The Groves family, 1887**

From left to right: (standing) Irene, Constance and Ernest; (seated) Edward and Isabella.

**Source:** E.K. Groves, *George Müller and his Successors* (1906), p.130.

agreed that the engagement should be broken off. The matter reached the ears of James Wright, who held that an engagement to marry was as inviolate as the marriage vows themselves. Edward could find no scriptural authority for such a belief, and took the matter to the

Friday meeting. The members, including Fred Bergin, sided with Wright without considering the various letters and testimonies submitted by Edward, with the result that Constance's name was blackened in the eyes of Bethesda. Realising that further protest would only remind the meeting that he was a thrice-certified lunatic, and thus, as everyone knew, liable to suffer from hallucinations. Edward abandoned his efforts to get Mr Wright to apportion any blame to Mr Wilson. Edward remained convinced that Mr Wright had lied to the meeting, and he never forgave him or Mr Bergin for their failure to support Constance.<sup>17</sup>

This was a snub too far; disillusioned with how Müller and Wright were running the SKI, increasingly frustrated at his failure to achieve the approval he craved, and finding himself sidelined from mainstream Bethesda activity, Edward began a campaign of pamphlets and articles on topics he knew would be distasteful to the Bethesda elders.

#### **A whiff of heresy**

His first effort was a pamphlet called *Bethesda Missionary Matters*, of which no copies remain extant, designed as a handbook for members of the Bethesda community who might be interested in becoming directly involved with the missionaries supported by the Assembly, but which was criticised for giving too many personal details of individual missionaries. This was followed by a series of articles that were published in the monthly journal *The Faith*,<sup>18</sup> in which Edward began to hint at his belief in conditional immortality, and by a pamphlet entitled *Spiritual Footbinding*, an attack on the generally held Brethren belief that there was no significant role for women in the public affairs of the church. Edward submitted this document to the Friday meeting for approval, but was asked to withdraw it as being too controversial (it was also never published at

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17. Groves, *Müller*, pp 132-137; SOAS Archive MS 381056, J.D. Owen, (ed.), Douthwaite-Groves letter archive, Book 1, pp 40-43.

18. *The Faith* was a monthly journal on religious matters published by The Faith Press Ltd of Malvern, Gloucestershire. The editor during Edward Groves's period as a contributor, which began in 1901, was Cyrus E. Brooks. *The Faith* was also published in Bristol, London, Adelaide, Melbourne and Auckland.

the request of the meeting, as it was felt to be too disturbing).<sup>19</sup> Thwarted in this attempt to publish his views on the ministry of women, on Boxing Day 1895, Edward paid a visit to a meeting of the Brethren assembly in Bath where he challenged the speaker on the narrowness of the texts under discussion, causing great offence to all those present. The result was a visit two days later from Fred Bergin carrying a ticket for a ship sailing to Port Said the very next week, as George Müller had decided that although Edward was showing no signs of incipient breakdown, it was time for him to have a change of scene.

For the next two and half years Edward took no further part in the administrative affairs of Bethesda, apart from keeping the Bethesda directory up to date. He contented himself with attending the Alma Road chapel on Sundays with his family, while during the week maintaining his literary efforts, and helping to entertain his three grandchildren who were now permanently resident with Edward and Isabella following the death of his daughter Constance in 1896 and her husband Dr A.W. Douthwaite in 1899, both whilst working for the CIM in China.<sup>20</sup> Along with his monthly contributions to *The Faith*, Edward published a pamphlet entitled *The Pre-Millennial Return of our Lord in Visible Form is a DELUSION*, in which Edward argued against orthodox Brethren doctrine on the second advent, which was his clearest statement yet hinting at his belief in conditional immortality. Needless to say the pamphlet was greeted with hostility by Bethesda, and was taken by the Brethren as further proof of a disordered mind.

A few weeks after the death of George Müller in March 1899, Edward received a visit from two members of the Bethesda council; they brought word that Edward could rejoin its meetings on condition that he abstained from putting forward his views relating to the expected Millennium. When the day approached for his opportunity to address the Alma Road congregation, he determined to return to the attack, and in order to avoid embarrassing Isabella, he suggested

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19. Groves, *Müller*, p.157.

20. J.D. Owen & D.C. Morgan, *Douthwaite of the Double Dragon: portrait of a medical missionary* (Braiswick, Felixstowe, 2006), pp.133-134.

that she went to the main Bethesda chapel that morning. Sticking to his undertaking not to discuss the second coming, Edward addressed the Alma congregation on charitable giving. This was a veiled attack on George Müller's policy of never requesting donations or of offering public acknowledgement for contributions to SKI's funds. Edward argued that this policy of not appearing to need temporal support resulted in many of Müller's disciples spending all their income on themselves, whereas Edward was trying to promote the principle of regular giving to the Church.<sup>21</sup>

The consequence of Edward's address was that within forty-eight hours he was visited by two senior elders who informed him that his recently restored privileges were once again forfeit as was his seat at the Friday meeting. In response Edward drafted a letter, which he circulated to the elders and deacons of Bethesda, in which he described what he considered to be the ritualistic drift of Ashley Down rule. This was essentially an attack on James Wright who had become the Director of the SKI following the death of George Müller. In the letter Edward accused Wright of leading Bethesda away from one of the founding principles of Brethrenism, which clearly stated that no building should ever be regarded as sacred, and that those places in which Brethren gathered to pray should be no different from the simple upper room in which Jesus held his Last Supper. This was an allusion to Wright's refusal six or seven years previously to permit ladies to use the vestry at the Alma Road chapel for their afternoon meetings at which they made articles for sale in aid of the missionaries.

Edward followed this up with a challenging pamphlet on the subject of oversight, which he distributed to all the members of the Bethesda fellowship. In the pamphlet he included this passage, which is clearly referring to his own feeling of being wronged:

Both in the Establishment and among Dissenters substantial remuneration in the shape of money is awarded to those who take pastoral charge. We decline to make any such arrangement, and we do well. We equally decline to know, esteem highly in love or obey such as for the love of Christ addict themselves to this work, and as

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21. Groves, *Müller*, pp.179-185.

a natural result there is no eager desire for work whose wages are paid neither in love or money'.<sup>22</sup>

Later in the letter Edward refers to how James Wright broke faith with him in regard to the publication of the second report on missionary progress, and comments bitterly: 'Ashley Down receives £3,000 a year for distribution among missionaries, what does the Director care about fostering the increase of the Church's paltry £300?' Edward closed the letter with the passages from the Bible which had led him not to expect the personal return of the Saviour from heaven to earth until such time as God the Father had made the world obey the Saviour's commands, and acknowledge Him as their lawful King.<sup>23</sup>

Over the next six months and in the face of deteriorating relations with James Wright and the other members of the Bethesda council, Edward's thoughts turned to his belief in conditional immortality,<sup>24</sup> and he decided to go public with this and wrote a letter to the Bethesda elders warning them of his intentions. This letter became known as the confession of Mr Groves; the letter concluded with the following words:

Bethesda holds and teaches that the spirit of man is immortal, and that an eternity of either happiness or misery awaits each of the children of man, BUT, I hold, and henceforth shall teach, the spirit of man is not immortal, but sustained in life by Him, who only hath immortality.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Edward's 'confession' and its consequences.**

To the elders of Bethesda, Edward had been a constant irritant and they must have often wished he would leave them in peace and seek a church more sympathetic to his views, which although considered

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22. *Ibid.*, p.191

23. *Ibid.*, p.192.

24. Orthodox Brethren belief was that the soul of man is immortal and that after death unbelievers would have to endure eternal torment; on the other hand believers in conditional immortality held that the soul of non-Christians simply ceased to exist, hence the alternative name for it, annihilationalism: for disputes in the Brethren on this doctrine cf. Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes, 2006), pp.169-70.

25. Groves, *Müller*, p.198.

heretical by the Brethren, were in fact shared by an increasing number of progressive evangelicals. Why Edward should choose this point in time to challenge the Bethesda leadership to a showdown is difficult to understand. Was he embittered by the fact that whatever he proposed had been brushed aside because he was three times certified as a lunatic? Was it because he never received any credit for such progress as had been made by Bethesda under his prodding? Or did he really think he could convert Bethesda to what they regarded as the heretical doctrine of conditional immortality? A possible explanation is that Edward was subconsciously playing out his sense of injustice for the traumas he experienced in his early life, with his challenging behaviour ensuring that more trauma ensues: this is a scenario that sometimes occurs in sufferers from post-traumatic stress. Edward may have lacked judgement, but he did not lack courage, and he was not afraid to proclaim what he considered to be the Truth. Or put another way: 'When I saw a sheep straying, I felt it my duty to bark, bark, and bark again, till he retraced his steps'.<sup>26</sup> The trouble was that Edward did not know when to stop barking.

Within a few days of receipt of the 'Confession', Fred Bergin came to call and presented Edward with a demand for his immediate

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26. *Ibid.*, p.88.



**‘The Author in consultation’  
Edward Kennaway Groves c.1903.**

**Source:** E.K. Groves, *The Key of Knowledge and how to use it*  
(ed.) C.E. Brookes (1904), frontispiece.

resignation from the Bethesda assembly. This Edward refused to do, claiming that as he was still a member of the Church, he had the right to hear what the meeting thought of his confession, and on his promising not to speak, Bergin gave grudging consent to Edward attending the Church meeting, which was held at Stokes Croft chapel on 3 July 1900. The outcome was a foregone conclusion and without Edward’s confession being admitted in evidence, he was expelled from Bethesda. Incensed that his confession was not given an airing at the meeting and determined to fight on, Edward had two thousand copies of his confession printed, and circulated to the members of Bethesda along with a list of complaints about the conduct of his

‘Trial’. His efforts evoked not a glimmer of support from the rank and file membership, but not being a man to give up without a fight, Edward circulated another pamphlet in defence of conditional immortality. Again there was no response from Bethesda, but only a visit from Frederick Stanley Arnot, the central African missionary who was at this time the pastor of Bethesda, who called to request that in future Edward should stay away from Bethesda and its satellite chapels.<sup>27</sup> Edward submitted quietly, and as he wrote ‘From that day I never have—nor ever will—darken their doors again.’<sup>28</sup>

Belonging to a church community had always been an essential part of Edward’s life, and he lost no time in looking for an alternate spiritual home. He applied for membership of the Baptist chapel opposite Bethesda’s Stokes Croft chapel,<sup>29</sup> but his application was declined on the grounds that Bethesda might be upset if the Baptists accepted one of their members who had been expelled. Edward had better luck with Highbury Congregational Church where the pastor assured him that neither he nor his father before him believed in the eternal torment of the unsaved.<sup>30</sup> Edward continued to attend there for the rest of his life, but having seen enough of church politics, he made no attempt to seek formal membership.

There is no doubt that Edward was hurt by his expulsion; he cared deeply for Bethesda and the words of St Paul he took as his motto were entirely appropriate: ‘I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved’ (2 Cor. 12:15), yet while his uncle was alive there was a limit as to how far he could push for reform.<sup>31</sup> It should be remembered that Edward

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27. Groves only states that it was ‘a missionary from Central Africa’ (Groves, *Müller*, p.212), but Ernest Baker, *The Life and Explorations of Frederick Stanley Arnot: The authorised biography of a zealous missionary, intrepid explorer, & self-denying benefactor amongst natives of Africa* (London, 1921), p.270, shows it was Arnot who was functioning as the pastor in Bristol at that time.

28. Groves, *Müller*, p.212.

29. *Ibid.*, p.223.

30. Highbury Congregational Church is located in Whiteladies Road, Clifton, Bristol, no more than 300 yards from Edward’s home in Greenway Road. See also: <<http://www.redlandparkchurch.co.uk/beginnings.htm>> [accessed March 2011].

31. Groves, *Müller*, p.227.

wrote *George Müller and his Successors* around 1904; George Müller had been dead for six years, so Edward was free of the need to suppress his opinion of his famous relative, and no longer did he have to worry about how the Bethesda hierarchy would react. The fact that Edward gave the title *George Müller and his Successors* to what was essentially his own autobiography reveals how obsessed he had become with his grievances over his treatment by Müller, Wright and Bergin over the twenty-five years of his association of Bethesda. Although Edward had stood in awe of his uncle all his life, there is a thread of criticism running throughout the book. Edward is generous in his praise and he freely acknowledges the greatness of his uncle's achievement in establishing and maintaining the Orphan Homes, but there is implied criticism even on the very first page: 'I do not know of any one of whom it can be said that he studied to show himself approved unto God throughout his long life, more than the founder of the largest orphanage in England'. It is almost as if Edward is suggesting that George Müller actively encouraged the development of a personality cult, and he returns to this several times, making the point that, because 'he studied to show himself approved unto God',<sup>32</sup> no one was prepared to challenge or criticise George Müller. Müller's position seemed to consist of, "See how I am walking with God; all you have to do is to submit to my judgement."<sup>33</sup> He had no time to urge his listeners to seek grace for themselves, and he had neither the interest nor the ability in offering pastoral guidance on the meaning of scripture, being totally absorbed in his responsibilities for the Orphanages and SKI. These views were apparently shared by his brother Henry Groves, who when asked by Edward why he had left Bristol and gone to live in Kendal, had, according to Edward, replied that it was impossible to develop any gift in the Bethesda while it was treated as a department of the SKI, adding, "Two cocks cannot crow on the same dunghill."<sup>34</sup>

What drove Edward to criticise his uncle in his book? It is as if the austere George Müller, who was unable to offer Edward the love

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32. *Ibid.*, p.1.

33. *Ibid.*, p.85.

34. *Ibid.*, p.25.

he so much needed, became a lightning conductor for Edward's subconscious resentment at the loss of love in childhood and the successions of rejection and failures that dogged much of his life. No one else ever seemed to have criticised George Müller, so why could Edward not write a book in praise of his uncle such as were written, for example, by Pierson in 1899, and Steer in 1986.<sup>35</sup> Thanks to twenty-first century psychiatry and the insights into human behaviour granted by the study of psychotherapeutic principles, we can be almost certain that Edward suffered from Bipolar Disorder (Type One), previously known as Manic Depression, the causation of which is sometimes associated with a disturbed or traumatic childhood. The main diagnostic feature is a tendency for the victim to experience swings of behaviour between manic activity and depression. Edward fits the diagnosis with a history of recurrent bouts of short-lived episodes of mania, all of which were associated with stress of one sort or another. Some sufferers from Bipolar Disorder have difficulty in maintaining personal relationships, others have Obsessive-Compulsive problems, and Edward certainly showed obsessive behaviour in that he insisted that his interpretation of scripture was God given, was the only Truth. There were other examples of obsessive behaviour such as his attention to detail in the way he revised Bethesda's membership roll, and his four-year work in developing and marketing his self-acting sick bed.<sup>36</sup> There was also an element of paranoia in Edward's personality, as shown by his intense antipathy, bordering on hatred, to Exclusivism and Roman Catholicism. The early part of his book gives no suggestion of clinical depression, but following his expulsion from Bethesda Edward lost his status as a member of the oversight meeting, and he became isolated from the fellowship of the congregation and much else that he had valued, and it is distinctly possible that he swung from being prone to bouts of mania into a depressive state. Unable to

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35. Pierson, *Müller*; Roger Steer, *Admiring God: the best of George Müller* (London 1986).

36. The self-acting sickbed was a modified hospital bed which allowed a patient's bowel and bladder waste to be collected without the intervention of the nursing staff. Groves, *Müller*, pp.109-111.

express this while his uncle was alive, and once his restraining influence and that of Bethesda had been removed, Edward no longer needed to contain his resentment, and perhaps *George Müller and his Successors* should be regarded as an exercise in catharsis.<sup>37</sup>

Edward's adverse comments on George Müller are mild compared with those he made on Wright and Bergin, probably because they were both directly involved in episodes in which Edward felt he had lost out. He never forgave James Wright for preferring Horace Wilson's account of the broken engagement to that given by his daughter Constance; he even goes so far as to declare that when the affair was discussed at the Friday meeting, like St Peter, Wright lied not once but thrice. A similar situation arose in the case in which, according to Edward, Wright accepted false testimony concerning a superintendent of Stokes Croft Sunday School who got into financial difficulty and was eventually expelled from Bethesda. James Wright may have been narrow in vision but there can be no doubt that he was a good and honest man, but in these two cases he delivered verdicts with which Edward could not agree, therefore he was a liar.<sup>38</sup>

Comments that Edward made on James Wright include the following:

Up to this moment I had respected him as a man of God, narrow minded and intensely conservative it is true, but thoroughly honest. I now saw he had crossed the Rubicon, and by deliberate falsehood, which he would never retract, had become an agent of SATAN, and that he would be compelled by the adversary to repeat the same offence again and again. He was on the DOWNGRADE'.<sup>39</sup>

Edward's comments on his erstwhile friend Fred Bergin were even stronger. Their relations were never the same after Edward came home with broken ribs from Northwood House and Bergin refused to believe his story of how he was assaulted by an attendant;<sup>40</sup> they

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37. The interpretation of Edward's mental health issues in this paragraph is based on a personal communication from Dr Robert C. Cutler, MSc MB, BS., Member of the Institute of Group Analysis, notes on Edward Groves's mental health issues.

38. Groves, *Müller*, pp.213-215.

39. *Ibid.*, p.137.

40. *Ibid.*, p.91.

deteriorated further after the affair of Constance's broken engagement, and further still after Bergin became Deputy Director of the SKI, and was responsible for orchestrating Edward's expulsion from Bethesda. These are some of his comments on Bergin:

Having a typical Irish conscience which always follows in the wake of its owner's affections, nothing that Mr Wright said or did but commend itself to his judgement.<sup>41</sup>

Edward considered that Bergin had 'No fixed principles of righteousness, and the last man to be trusted with the power which George Müller was divinely fitted to wield'.<sup>42</sup>

If Edward's criticisms of Müller, Wright and Bergin can perhaps be understood in the light of his repressed frustration, some of his ideas expressed in the later chapters of *George Müller and his Successors* range from the unrealistic and impractical to the bizarre and grotesque. Edward does not record the date he began work on his autobiography, but given the lucidity and detail in the chapters covering his early life, his nervous breakdowns, and the events leading up to his expulsion from Bethesda, it seems likely that it had been work in progress for many years, and was probably based on the journals he was known to keep. Following his expulsion from Bethesda, Edward was cut off from what had become his main *raison d'être*; shopping, cooking and acting as kitchen maid were no substitute for a role in the inner councils of Bethesda, and given a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder, it is distinctly possible that he became clinically depressed and his mental equilibrium unbalanced. Certainly the contents of the later chapters of his book, when compared with the earlier ones, show evidence of disturbed thought processes. The following statement concerning the future of Bethesda written in the light of his obsession with what he believed to be the Romanist influence of the ex-Exclusives in the church can be cited as an example:

The day is soon coming when we shall sit on Brandon Hill and watch its destruction with a calm and holy joy, as the last fortress that defended the doctrine of eternal torment. When turf covers the

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41. *Ibid.*, p.141.

42. *Ibid.*, p.142.

site on which Bethesda stands, and the ground is given up to the municipality to be incorporated in Brandon Hill, perhaps an epitaph may mark its present entrance as the grave of protestant persecution.<sup>43</sup>

Or further evidence of his disturbed thought processes can be found in this quotation taken from Chapter 44, entitled 'His Protection of Lust', in which Edward ascribes many of the social ills of the day to Satan's role within that other target of his hatred, the Roman Catholic Church:

The reason for this is that the laws of the realm date from the period of Roman Catholic supremacy, and the evils resulting therefrom are only removed one by one as they are brought to light. The celibate clergy, having facilities of private intercourse with the wives and daughters of the laity, made sexual transgression on the part of the male a light offence, and covered the woman with shame who dared to bring her own wrongs under public notice.<sup>44</sup>

These quotations are a small sample of the thoughts and ideas expressed by Edward in the closing chapters of his autobiography. What do they tell us about Edward Groves? Was he just a harmless old crank when he wrote these words, or was he a seriously disturbed man with a long history of mental illness? Certainly some of his ideas might be considered to be an attempt to provoke discussion in a society just emerging from sixty years of Victorian prudery, but others are too bizarre to be considered even remotely constructive, and suggest that the author may have been on the brink of another mental breakdown. We shall never know for certain, but must content ourselves with the thought that Edward Groves at his best was indeed a loveable, competent and forward thinking man, brought into conflict with the world about him through mental processes he was unable to control.

Certain as always of the rightness of his own opinions, Edward closed *George Müller and his Successors* with the following words:

It is the assurance that I have from God that I shall see these things come to pass, that gilds my old age with unclouded sunshine.<sup>45</sup>

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43. *Ibid.*, p.223

44. *Ibid.*, p.243.

45. *Ibid.*, p.384.

### The final years

Edward's relations with the Bethesda hierarchy had for many years been uncomfortable, and he comes across as a difficult person to deal with, but in his relations with his own family he was a different man. His children and grandchildren, for whom he could never do enough, held Edward in great respect and affection, and he was the undoubted head of the family, even if he was slightly eccentric. One only has to read the letters written to him from China by his daughter Constance to see a different side of the man who struggled with Bethesda. Connie's letters to her father are full of love and respect, and give no hint that she was writing to a man who had been certified as insane three times, any more than those written by Dr Douthwaite did, and he was not a man to suffer fools gladly.<sup>46</sup>

After Edward's expulsion from Bethesda in 1900, although there was a chronic shortage of money, life continued peacefully at the family home in Bristol. His daughter, Irene Groves, managed to earn enough from her music lessons to keep the household going financially, whilst bearing responsibility for the children's education and upbringing. Edward was kept busy with his kitchen duties, he ran errands, he entertained the grandchildren until they were old enough to entertain themselves, made toys and models in his workshop, and helped Isabella in the production of the contents of the orphan baskets, and until he quarrelled with the editor of *The Faith*, he produced a steady stream of pamphlets and articles for that journal, culminating in 1904 with the publication of *The Key of Knowledge and how to use it*, in which he drew together a series of previously published articles from it on such topics as conditional immortality and the ministry of women.<sup>47</sup> In 1907 Isabella was seriously ill with a

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46. SOAS Archive Collection, MS381056, J.D. Owen, (ed.) Douthwaite-Groves papers 1887-1897.

47. Edward Kennaway Groves, *The Key of Knowledge and how to use it* (Malvern, 1904); available online at <<http://www.worldcat.org/title/key-of-knowledge-and-how-to-use-it-with-a-preface-by-the-editor-of-the-faith-and-an-appendix-giving-some-account-of-recent-events-in-church-history/oclc/679305814?title=&detail=&page=frame&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcatalog.hathitrust.org%2Fapi%2Fvolumes%2Foclc%2F55770597.html%26checksum%3D3>>

stomach ailment; so serious was her condition, Irene feared for her mother's life. Thanks to medical intervention involving a highly specialised diet, Isabella recovered but remained bed-ridden for the rest of her life. An entry in Isabella's journal of this period reads:

The darling grandchildren always pay me a daily visit. Pearl comes in when free, for a longer chat, and Isabel and Harry pay an extra visit when they want something they so well know Granny loves to give. My husband, how kind he has been to me, taking such pleasure in cooking my small dinners, carrying the orphan basket near and far, and all through the winter lighting my fire. I am highly favoured, having a peaceful holiday of rest and love'.<sup>48</sup>

Isabella died peacefully, aged 82, on 22 October 1912.

Edward outlived Isabella by five years, having cared for her throughout her bed-bound years, but he missed her company dreadfully. He had been accustomed to read aloud to her in the evenings and after she died he wanted Irene to let him read to her. Irene found this difficult; not only did she begrudge the few hours of spare time from teaching the piano, but true to form, Edward and she could not agree on which books should be read, and so, unusually for Edward, they reached a compromise by which each chose a book in turn.

Edward died peacefully at home with his son Ernest at his bedside on 16 February 1917. The cause of death was certified as angina pectoris and bronchitis. Perhaps there is no better conclusion to the Edward Groves story than these words written by Dr Robert Cutler in his notes on Edward's psychology:

Edward was part of his Victorian culture and society. Energy and inventiveness, a 'can do' attitude that with cleverness, discipline and hard work the world can be made to yield to our desires was part of the Victorian mindset; indeed the achievements of that era are extraordinary. Perhaps in parallel with our growing realisation now that there were hidden consequences for the world, and that engineering and commercial achievement does not necessarily

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48. Groves family private papers, The Journals of Isabella Groves. See below, 'Appendix: A Note on Sources'.

address all of our human needs, Edward was faced with still having to live with himself, his internal world, and his relationships. He seems to have made at least a partial success of the struggle, and his heroism in that deserves respect.<sup>49</sup>

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49. Cutler, notes.

## **Appendix: A Note on Sources**

The primary source of information on Edward Groves has been of necessity his own autobiography, *George Müller and his Successors*. There are no personal details about Edward in the memoir of his father, only the announcement of his birth in *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves* p.361, and the blessing Norris Groves gave him from his deathbed. (*Memoir*, p.510)

The descendents of Edward Groves have maintained a small archive to which I have had unrestricted access. In the archive there are the two journals of Edward's wife, Isabella Groves, which include accounts of their daughters' early years and some old family photographs, many of which have deteriorated beyond recovery. There is also an autobiography written by Irene Groves covering the years 1885 to 1935, which like her mother's journals offer only a brief glimpse of Edward. The other document of interest is comprised of a collection of some childhood memories of their orphaned grandchildren, who spent their early years in the Groves household in Bristol. Mrs Diana Morgan, the granddaughter of Isabel Douthwaite, Connie's second surviving daughter, compiled this for the benefit of her own children, and it is this document that gives us a glimpse of Edward Groves, the family man.

The remaining family source is the Douthwaite-Groves letter collection which has been deposited in the Special Collections archive at the University of London School of African and Asian Studies (MS 381056). The collection consists of over 300 letters covering the period 1887 to 1896, written to her parents by Constance and her husband Dr Arthur Douthwaite from their CIM post in China. The letters to Edward are warm and affectionate and show both the high respect in which they held him, and his wide range of interests.

The details of Edward's admission to the Royal Bethlem Hospital in 1880 are contained in the copy of his in-patient notes obtained from the archives of the Royal Bethlem Hospital (<[www.bethlemheritage.org.uk](http://www.bethlemheritage.org.uk)>). The interpretation of Edward's mental health issues is based on a personal communication from Dr Robert C. Cutler, MSc MB, BS, Member of the Institute of Group Analysis.