

BHR 5:76-8 (2008)

Robber of the Cruel Streets: The Prayerful Life of George Muller

Clive Langmead

Farnham: CWR, 2006

172pp £9.99 ISBN: 10 1853453951

**Robber of the Cruel Streets: The Story of George Muller,
Written, directed and produced by Crawford Telfer**

**CTA Production with UCB, ERF and Christian History
Institute, 2006**

DVD 60 minutes £14.99

For evangelical Christians, George Müller loses neither his fascination nor his ability to inspire. Over the 110 years since his death his story has inspired individuals to a deeper prayer life, many to depend on God for their daily provision, and many orphanages run on similar lines to his own. Children's works are still being created today in many different countries in response to his example. In the last few years, I have come across such works in central Romania and northern Zambia. The three trusts which stem from his work in Bristol, of which I have the privilege of being a trustee, seek to continue his work according to the principles that he laid down, though the character of the work differs vastly from his own multi-faceted work in the nineteenth century.

Over the past 100 years, he has attracted many biographical studies, short and long. Thanks to his *Autobiography* and the extensive annual reports of his Scriptural Knowledge Institution, there is no shortage of source material. So far as I am aware, however, there is as yet no scholarly biography. This twinned book and DVD do not pretend to fill the gap. Of their sort, however, they are quite excellent and deserve to be widely read and seen. The aim is to communicate about and popularise Müller and his work, particularly no doubt to Christian audiences. Even so, the early parts of both items draw on Dr Stephan Holthaus' recent research on the early years of Müller in Germany.

The DVD focuses on Müller's early years, adolescence, conversion, and decision to follow Groves' faith principle; the initiation and growth of the orphan work; and, briefly, his international teaching tours after 1870. Understandably, for want of space, the leadership of Bethesda, church-planting around Bristol, support of missionaries at home and abroad, the literature work, and the schools work (apart from that in the orphanages) are not mentioned. The presentation is sharp, glossy and colourful, with some excellent modern views of Teignmouth and Bristol, and the dirt on the ragged street children seems obviously to have been applied by the make-up department—though it is worth remembering that our normal visual appreciation of Victorian England is through monochrome etchings and photographs and this no doubt partly accounts from the drab impression we have of the era. Russell Boulter's mellifluous narration is low-key and unobtrusive. Often, Müller is allowed to speak for himself in his own words.

Though at sixty minutes the DVD is a trifle long for use in church services and home groups, it is well worth using for evangelistic and pre-evangelistic purposes, and to challenge believers about lifestyle and giving.

The companion biography is well-produced and copiously illustrated in both colour and sepia. If it was intended as the sort of coffee-table book that visitors might pick up, the objective has certainly been achieved. Clive Langmead writes simply and well, and in 173 generously laid-out and illustrated pages he has captured many key points about Müller and the work, points which are not always grasped in the shorter popular biographies. As a briefing, it could scarcely be bettered, though the focuses are those of the DVD. The chapters are intercalated with encouragements to emulate Müller today.

One point that is worth noting in the *Brethren Historical Review* is that the DVD does not mention that Müller was connected with—indeed was as much as anyone else the founder of—the Open Brethren. In the book there are two references to the Brethren connection, the longer of which (p. 60) manages to suggest that in associating with the Brethren he did not really know what he was

doing! 'Without really realising it George had joined the nascent Brethren (later Plymouth Brethren) movement then just beginning to spread across England and Ireland.' Since this refers to his contacts with Anthony and Mary Groves in 1829-30, the comment is in any case slightly ahead of things chronologically. (The other reference occurs incidentally with respect to Robert Chapman (p. 126).) No doubt, in evangelistic tools, it would have been impolitic today to have said more about the Brethren connection, however unfair that is.

Neil Summerton