

Give Heed To Reading

1 Timothy 4:13

by Guy N. Woods

Books are to the [Christian] just what tools are to the carpenter; and as the character of work the carpenter does depends largely on the kind of tools he possesses, so do the [Christian's] bookshelves reflect the kind of [Christianity] he does. A man no more builds himself into his home than he does into his bookshelves.

A [Christian] who has never had the privilege of attending a Christian college, of sitting at the feet of the great among us, and imbibing their learning and profiting by their varied experiences may feel handicapped, but one does not necessarily make a successful [Christian] by attending college. It is impossible for one to accumulate in the brief period of a college course the learning necessary to preach the gospel with power and effect. Emerson once said: "Everybody ought to go to college to learn its inadequacy." One learns to [be Christian] by [being Christian]—there is no other way. It is not the number of degrees of which a man may boast that makes his [Christianity] dynamic, but the long, weary hours he spends in his study, hours of toil when the mind grows weary and the head aches, but a study from which he emerges with the clear light of truth.

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[He] has well said that "genius consists of two percent inspiration and ninety-eight percent perspiration I" A study of biography reveals that true genius is simply a capacity for hard, gruelling [*sic*] work—work from which others turn away in defeat. A determination to let no obstacle, however formidable, hinder one's progress, and an assiduity that works on until the end has been reached are the requisities [*sic*] to success in every field of endeavor.

A prized possession of this writer is a complete file of the Millennial Harbinger, A. Campbell's paper, edited by him during the years 1830-1864. The vast amount of learning in these volumes from his pen staggers the imagination and leads one to wonder how a man could possibly accumulate such a vast store of knowledge in the brief span of one lifetime. But it is said that in his earlier years he spent sixteen hours a day in his study. Throughout his life he arose at an unusually early hour and followed regularly a schedule of study, permitting nothing, however important, to interfere therewith. The result of such industry and attention made him the most gifted man of his age. Surely a greater has not lived since the days of inspired men.

Albert Barnes was a scholar of great ability. He is chiefly known today for his "Notes on the New Testament," a work which, in the opinion of

this writer, is excelled by few commentaries today. In a sermon entitled "Life at Threescore" he gave the following regarding his labors:

I have seen the value of industry, and as I owe to this, under God, whatever success I have..., it seems to me not improper to speak of it here and to recommend the habit to those who are just entering life. I had nothing else to depend on but this. I had no capital when I began life; I had no powerful patronage to help me; I had no natural endowments, as I believe no man has that could supply the place of industry; and it is not improper here to say that all I have been able to do in this world has been the result of habits of industry begun in early life, which were commended to me by the example of a venerated father, and which have been, and are, an abiding source of enjoyment.

It is a fact that the extent of one's accomplishments is determined in many cases by the hour at which one arises in the morning. To arise only a few minutes earlier and devote this extra time to the study of the Bible would, if continued through a lifetime, enable one to accumulate an inexhaustible store of learning in the field of sacred literature. In the sermon by Mr. Barnes alluded to above he said:

Doctor Doddridge, in reference to his own work, the 'Paraphrase on the New Testament,' a work which, in my judgment, better expresses the true sense of the New Testament, and is a more finished and elegant commentary on that portion of the Bible than any other in the English language, said that its being written at all was owing to the difference between rising at five and at seven in the morning.

A remark similar to this will explain all that I have done. Whatever I have accomplished in the way of commentary on the Scriptures is to be traced to the fact of rising at four in the morning and to the time thus secured which I thought might properly be employed in a work not immediately connected with my pastoral labors. . . . All my commentaries on the Scriptures have been written before nine o'clock in the morning. At the very beginning, now more than thirty years ago, I adopted a resolution to stop writing on these notes when the clock struck nine. This resolution I have invariably adhered to, not infrequently finishing my morning task in the midst of a paragraph, and sometimes even in the midst of a sentence. . . .

In the recollection now of the past portions of my life, I refer to these morning hours—to the stillness and quiet of my room in this house of God when I have been permitted 'to prevent the dawning of the morning' in the study of the Bible, while the inhabitants of this great city were slumbering round about me, and before the cares of the day and its, direct responsibilities came on me—to the hours which I have thus spent in a close contemplation of divine truth, endeavoring to understand its import, to remove the difficulties that might pertain to it, and to ascertain its practical bearing on the Christian life. I look back to those periods of my life with gratitude to God, and I could not do a better thing with reference to my younger brethren in the [the church] than to commend this habit to them as one closely connected with their own personal piety and their usefulness in the world.

So felt and wrote the eminent and scholarly Albert Barnes near the end of his eventful life. It is not enough for a [Christian] . . . to plead the arduous duties of life as an excuse for neglect of

duty. Where there is a will, there is a way. Said Paul: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast [*sic*], unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (I Cor. 15:58.)

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