

ADVICE TO READERS

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In his Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Library in London (1969), the 'Doctor' emphasised the value of this library and the enormous help he had derived personally from using it. He then referred to the help given by libraries in the States during his five month summer break there that year. 'I know nothing more pleasurable and exciting as an occupation than the right use of a library', he continued, 'I really had a most enjoyable time in the United States, not in looking at scenery but going round libraries! The key to the enjoyment of a library is to follow up references ... If ever you come across something in your reading that you are not aware of, follow it out, investigate it, find something more about it. If there is a book on it, read it; and one thing will lead to another in a most fascinating manner'. We now reprint, with permission of the Evangelical Library, the Doctor's concluding remarks.

There are certain lessons which I think we can learn from all this. The first, I would say, is the importance of balanced reading. Do not get into the bad habit of only reading one side of any issue or on any subject. I have known many people fall into this thoroughly bad habit. They only read their own side and they only read the authors whom they know are going to repeat what they already believe. Read the other side as well, because, I have shown you, that two men looking at the same facts, the same incidents, can describe them in almost entirely different ways. So read both sides, balance your reading. In fact this is not only an honest thing to do and an obvious commonsense thing to do, but I find it is a very profitable thing to do. Actually if you do it properly it will strengthen your original view, because you will get the other side, and it will stimulate you to answer it, and then men on your side will already have been answering it so it will strengthen you. But sometimes a spirit of fear comes into men's reading, it seems to me, and they are afraid to read things which they can not guarantee to be on their own side.

The same thing can happen, of course, with regard to listening. There was a lady in a certain church, which I must not mention, who when her minister, for whom she had great respect and regard, was lecturing on a certain subject and came to a particular aspect in which her father

had been very interested, and knowing that her minister did not agree with her father's view; instead of coming to listen to what the minister had to say about this subject stayed away. In spite of her respect for him she was not prepared to listen to another side in case it might upset what she had always received as almost divinely inspired from her own father. Now this is something of which we must never be guilty. Read books which hold an opposite view to the one you hold: it will sharpen your mind, and it will give you a better understanding; and it should end in substantiating the view you hold rather than in making you change it. Do not be guilty of the spirit of fear in connection with your reading. The second lesson which I have learned myself, and which I would suggest to you, is a very practical point: the importance of noting slight changes in the emphasis or the teaching of theological professors and preachers. Let me give you just one illustration. I referred just now to the Mercersberg Theology and J.W.Nevin. This impressed me and in a sense really frightened me. J.W.Nevin was a student under, and a pupil of, the great Charles Hodge in the 1820s. He was Charles Hodge's favourite pupil, so much so that when Hodge went on a visit to Germany about the middle of the 1820s he himself suggested that Nevin should deputise for him in what was then the Princeton Theological Seminary, the great bastion of Reformed faith, and so on. Charles Hodge picked out this man, J.W.Nevin, and he did deputise for Charles Hodge while he was away. But eventually J.W.Nevin became the leader of the Mercersberg Theology which became quite heretical at certain points and Hodge had to oppose him in an almost violent manner. What struck me, and amazed me, and almost alarmed me was that Nevin did not arrive at that new position in one step. No, it was a series of very small steps, almost imperceptible. Actually it started over their respective views of Charles G. Finney. There it began and from that it went on and developed, until in the end they were in two entirely different positions. Why do I say that? I do so for this reason. Some of us as Evangelicals are constantly being charged with being spiritual detectives, and we are said to condemn a man for a dot or a comma. They say that we are over-critical, that surely we must not all be agreed about everything, and if certain men who have always been evangelical say something on one occasion which we do not agree with we must not drop them and become excited. That is what is being said about us. But I would say on the basis of my reading throughout the years that what they are saying about us is mainly wrong. Why should a man begin to vary in his teaching? I could illustrate this over the question of Evolution. This is how it happened a hundred years ago and it is happening again now. They do not suddenly get up and say

that they do not believe the Scriptures; what they do say is, 'Well of course we have always taken the first three chapters of Genesis literally until now but we are not so sure about this now. Need we say this?' There was an instance in one of the weekly papers within the last few weeks where a man writing as a true evangelical explains away the account of Eve being made out of Adam's rib. But still he would claim that he has not departed from the authority of the Scriptures. It seems to be just a detail; but it is a departure. And it is from such small beginnings that men have often moved almost imperceptibly step by step until they are eventually in an entirely different position.

We are surely having evidence of this at the present time over the attitude to Roman Catholicism. 'Oh, but after all' they say. The moment a man says that, watch him. We must not think that these changes take place in big steps; they almost invariably take place in slight, minor changes. Then they go on from position to position and as the controversy develops they are eventually in an entirely different position. So let us pay great attention to what may appear to be but slight variations in men's view of any aspect of the Truth, and particularly, I would say, with regard to the Scriptures.

I end on this third and last lesson: **the importance of taking a whole view**. What I mean by that is that we must never be guilty of 'missing the wood because of the trees'. I sound as if I am contradicting myself. I have been impressing upon you the importance of paying attention to details, and I do so, and I hold to that; but be careful that in doing that you do not get into the position in which because of certain particular details you miss the big thing. Let me give an illustration. Take that Kentucky Revival. The great Archibald Alexander, the Founder of Princeton Theological Seminary, a man who wrote the book that has been re-published this year on the Log College knew that Revival intimately. He had been converted in a previous revival himself, and he knew all about these phenomena and these excesses and all these other things that happened in the Kentucky Revival. But Archibald Alexander because he was a big man, because he was a well read man, and because he saw the whole as well as the details did not - like some young men whom I have been reading recently and who clearly developed a 'one track mind' - condemn the whole of the Kentucky Revival as a tragedy or an error or a mistake because of certain features with which he was not in agreement. No, he saw the value of the whole, the greatness of this mighty movement

of the Spirit of God in spite of unfortunate tendencies and excesses that came in during the course of the Revival. Let us be careful not to develop this 'one track mind' type of thinking and pounce on details which we do not like and because of that condemn the whole. Nothing is perfect in this world; so let us look for the big things and excuse the excesses and the errors and try to correct them in a spirit of love. Above all let us be careful, that we do not condemn a work of God because in certain aspects of it the devil has seen his opportunity and has come in. Let us try to preserve this large, whole, balanced view. That, I think, is to be obtained ultimately by the right kind of reading and studying which I have suggested to you, and which is made possible by an institution such as this Evangelical Library.

We strongly urge readers to use the facilities of the Evangelical Library. For those unable to visit the library, books can be obtained by post. Further details are available from the Librarian, The Evangelical Library, 78a Chiltern Street, London W1M 2HB. Tel. 01-935 6997.

BOOK REVIEWS

RELIGION IN THE U.K.

The Editor

Great Britain may not be a 'Christian' country but according to recent research it is at least a 'religious' country with 74% of the population claiming a firm religious affiliation. This is the surprising statistic highlighted in the 'U.K. CHRISTIAN HANDBOOK - 1983 EDITION' and published jointly by the Evangelical Alliance, the Bible Society and Marc Europe (430pp £9.95).

After a brief introduction by the editor, Peter Brierley, there follow four interesting articles on Building up the Body of Christ, Religion in the U.K. Today, The Mission of the Church from Britain and, finally, The Sexual Division of Labour in Missionary Societies. The book is then divided unequally into three main sections, namely, the statistical, directory and the index. The directory section is the longest (pp41-321) and includes almost anything you may want to know about in church 48.