

## **March 2007**

### **Friends on our Shelves**

How many books have you read this year? Is that an unfair question? After all, it's only March. But this *is* the third month of the year. Time is pressing on. So while you are thinking about that, let me put another question. How many books did you read last year?

The Christian and his or her reading is a tremendously important matter. In an earlier age, Christians and books used to go together. Over the last forty or fifty years, an increasing number of 'Christian' publishing houses have sprung up, here at home and all around the world. Books, no doubt of very varying quality and profit, have appeared. Many older volumes have been reprinted and many new authors have arisen. We are well nigh saturated with possibilities. The cry can never go up, 'I've got nothing to read!'

Strangely, however, many Christians read very little. Most Christian books seem to pass them by. Or - and many of us have to own up at this point - even if we possess lots of books and are running out of bookcases in which to house them, *many of them remain unread*. We intend to get round to them eventually.

What's the answer? Well, one answer at least is along these lines: *making friends of the authors on our shelves*. In other words: don't just think of collecting and reading books - think of making and enjoying friends. We shall probably not actually meet that many authors in our lifetime face to face. And many of the choicest, of course, have long since been in heaven, so we cannot meet them yet. But, either way, through their books, we can get to know them as valuable friends whose friendship does us real spiritual and practical good.

As God introduces and blesses these friends to us we can learn, in a well balanced way, the meaning of the Bible (commentaries and expositions of Scripture); the glories of doctrine (books explaining how all the truths of the Bible relate together and declare the glory of God); the workings of the heart (devotional studies, journals and diaries); the mighty works and providences of God (church history); the practical outworking of the Christian life (what we often call 'ethics', applying timeless truth to pressing contemporary problems); the ups and downs of knowing and serving God (autobiography and biography) - and so on!

Along the way, some of these authors will become our particular favourites. We shall turn to them again and again. We shall recommend them to others. We shall be thankful to God for them. Have you found this to be so? Let me encourage you to think of books like this: making friends with the authors on your shelves. Oh: and one of the best friends I have ever made in this way? No question about it: it's Octavius Winslow!