BOOKS I HAVE READ: FEBRUARY MISCELLANY

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In addition to three novels and four books on Romans, I also read two books of military history and one on pacifism. There is, I feel, a lack of consistency in my reading!
Category: Reviews

Fiction

I'm still working my way through the Antony Price back catalogue and this month saw me revisit what is perhaps the best of them:Â The Old Vengeful. If you enjoy John Le CarrÃ© or Len Deighton, but have never read Price, you should give him a go. I also had a re-read ofÂ Master and CommanderÂ by Patrick O'Brien; mainly because it was for sale on Kindle. If you've seen the film with Russell Crowe; it bears little if any resemblance to the book.

I've read three fiction books this month and all of them are ones that I had previously read. However, unlike the other two, I first readÂ Puck of Pook's HillÂ by Rudyard Kipling as a child.Â To be honest, I remember next to nothing about it, but something in the press inspired me to re-read it and I'm glad I did. It's very much a book of it's time; but it's fun in an Arthur Ransome, CS Lewis, children's story fashion. Oh, and it's free for your generic reading device.

Non-Fiction

Most Brits are vaguely aware that Nelson once put his telescope to his blind eye and declared that he couldn't see a signal from his superior officer (though many actually think he said "I see no ships"). However, if they are anything like me, they know next to nothing about the battle at which this famous event took place.Â The Battle of Copenhagen 1801Â byÂ Ole Feldback is an excellent way to remedy this lack (and it is cheap on Kindle). The historic detail behind the battle is fascinating, especially at a time when Russia is once more flexing its muscles. Less interesting isÂ Commando: A Royal Marine's Story. There has been a rash of autobiographies written by ex-service personnel over the past few years and few of them offer anything by way of interesting insights. This isn't the worst I've read, but I wouldn't go out of my way to re-read it.

Christian Books

On the re-reading theme which featured higher up, I've been working my way back throughÂ Surprised by HopeÂ by Tom Wright in preparation for a sermon on the second coming. I am still of the opinion that this is one of the best popular theology books that I've read in many years. Given that this is a subject about which much ignorance is bandied about, I find it hard to understand why more people have not got to grips with what Wright has to say. Even if everyone doesn't agree with him, it would be nice to have some recognition that the "Left Behind", rapture school of eschatology is not the only game in town. It has been interesting readingÂ A Farewell to Mars: An Evangelical Pastor's Journey Toward the Biblical Gospel of PeaceÂ alongside Wright. Though Brian Zahnd's book highlights the issue of peace and warfare, it is actually centred around a reading of the Gospels which goes beyond a simple "Jesus came to take us to heaven" narrative, something which Wright highlights, too. Whether one agrees with Zahnd's pacifism, you have to take his call to radical discipleship seriously:

> *Perceiving the kingdom of God as an actual political reality is a game changer. Once you see*

> *that Jesus has his own political agenda, his own vision for arranging human society, his own criteria for judging nations, then itâ€™s impossible to give your heart and soul to the power-based, win-at-all-costs partisan politics that call for our allegiance. Unfortunately, what Iâ€™ve learned through bitter experience is that a lot of people donâ€™t want the game changed. They want to win the gameâ€"not change the game.*

This coming weekend, I'm speaking at a church weekend on the book of Romans. The idea is to get across the central ideas in four talks. This means that I've been looking for big theme materials, not commentaries which dig into the meaning of words and phrases in fine detail. I've found three books (well, four, actually) particularly helpful during my preparation, they are:Â Paul for Everyone: Romans 1,Â Paul for Everyone Romans Part 2Â andÂ Straight to the Heart of Romans. I was able to read through each of these books from start to finish, getting a great overall picture of Romans without getting bogged down in detail. This isn't to dismiss looking in detail, but there is a time and a place for different types of reading. Another book which I found helpful, was an oldie but a goody:Â Romans: A Digest of Reformed CommentÂ by Geoffrey B. Wilson. This series appeared in the 1970s and consist of pithy sayings from Puritan and other Reformed writers about verses from New Testament books. They are a great place to go for one-liners to sum up complex passages. They are not books to read through in one sitting, however.

By way of a closing competition (and to see if anyone has read to the bottom of this post), can anyone guess (or do they know) the connection between Geoffrey Wilson and Sue and I? Put your answers in the comments field or on Facebook.

It may be of interest to note that I've not actually read any mission books this month. I've read lots of articles and papers and made detailed notes on a few chapters, but I've not read any complete books.