

It is not to be wondered at, in this age of remote controls, computers, and luxury vehicles, that diligence is a rare commodity. Oh, there are, here and there, the hard working, self-sacrificing men and women that make our lazy world go round, but that we find them so refreshing and worthy of note seems an excellent illustration of our apathetic times. Everything is so easy, and 'letting it slide' so common, that we seldom feel the need for diligence in order to master. When there is little at stake for *not* doing our duty, we begin to deny that we ever had one. We begin, in short, to neglect our work. And this precisely why we need a proverb such as the one before us.

If, perhaps, we all had literal mountains to climb, kingdoms to conquer or natural forces to subdue, we might care to succeed more regularly. There is an exhilaration in physical effort that makes up for a good deal of the discomfort involved. A hike is, when you come down to it, an unnecessarily laborious way to get up a mountain. But the glow of walking all that way and wearing yourself out gives it a measure of the attraction that so many find in it. But if, in the place of a lush and rugged mountain, you put, say, twenty-five wretchedly dull e-mails to answer, two or three equally enjoyable meetings to attend, and an hour or so of sitting in traffic, the glow just isn't there. The difficulties we encounter in hum-drum, gray-washed life are often so thoroughly unromantic that we lose all interest in overcoming them. But the proverb doesn't say, 'There is nothing you can't master when you feel like it.' No one needs to be told that. Webster's dictionary defines the word 'diligence' as, "Steady, earnest, and energetic application and effort." Or simply doing what you have to do till it's done. No roses, no velvet; just duty. It's hard. But that's why the words 'difficult' and 'diligence' are so applicable.

So go be diligent. And here we run into another problem that the proverb addresses. Once we decide to try, we realize that the sense of nobility that accompanies the taking on of a distasteful task does not often outlast the first hour. It is the classic end of New Year's resolutions. Why is the parking lot of the gym so full in January and so empty come August? Because a resolution is not a victory. Try counting the number of projects you've begun and abandoned before they were through the planning stage. I know, it's embarrassing. Beginnings are good, and without them we would never get anywhere, but completion is the goal in view. Without it, nothing has been accomplished and diligence has not been exercised. To 'master' as the proverb says is indeed difficult and only true, lasting diligence will allow you to do it.

So what's the pay-off? Now that we have slaughtered self on the alter of diligence, what can we expect to gain from it? First of all, there is the thing itself; done and no longer requiring your attention. But there is also this: if we continue to practice diligence, it will become habit and then the whole world is at our feet. 'There is nothing so difficult that diligence cannot master it.' Webster's defines 'master' as, "To conquer or subdue." if we persevere the conquerer's laurels are ours just as much as they are the Olympiad's. Our struggle is far less romantic, and most often only ourselves know of it, but does that need to make the victory less satisfying? Remember the thrill of coming out of the trees and standing in the clear air of the mountain top? This is the reward of the diligent. This is the truth so well expressed in this poem of Madagascar's.

Go find a mountain. Pay no heed to size or steepness; just start climbing. It may take a day, a week, or a month. It may take your entire life. But with God's diligence in your right hand, is there anything you can't master in the end?