

A Three Years' Mistake



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ANYONE who had seen George J—— diligently reading his Bible every day might easily have taken him for a sincere Christian. Yet in reality he was an entire stranger to “joy and peace in believing.”

What, then, was the secret of all this diligence in Bible reading? We will try to explain. An ex-officer of the English army (H. T.) had come to the town where G. J—— resided, and was announced to preach the gospel in the public hall. To this meeting our friend G. J—— was prevailed upon to go. In the course of the address one word, more than any other, fastened itself upon his mind. It was the word

“NOW.”

With solemn earnestness the preacher sought to press the importance of this word upon his hearers in connection with the gracious opportunity that was there and then held out to them: “Behold, *now* is

the accepted time ; behold, *now* is the day of salvation," 2 Corinthians 6 : 2.

It is certainly high time, thought G. J.—, that *I* should make a start, if I would secure this priceless boon for myself. The verse says "NOW." I cannot do better, therefore, than begin at once. But *how* shall I begin ? Why, by doing good works, of course. And what better work can I do than read the Bible right through from the beginning ?

To this he earnestly set himself, and many a spare hour was taken up by what he considered to be a meritorious task. Nor was he contented with going through the holy book once, nor even twice.

Three years had passed away, and for the third time he had started this "good work" when the same preacher was again announced to preach in the public hall. With some measure of self-satisfaction because of his past three years' religious performances—for by this time he had been confirmed, had become a regular communicant, and a total abstainer—our friend went to the hall, and took his seat

with the rest of the audience. But on this occasion there was, with the former preacher, another officer's son ; and he it was who was the first to speak.

After opening his Bible, and announcing the scripture he wished to bring before his hearers, with more than ordinary sobriety in his manner, he read two verses with marked emphasis and great deliberation. These two verses proved to be enough to entirely upset our friend G. J——, as with one rude shock they seemed to completely overthrow all his religious notions, turning them upside down. Indeed, if *these* words were true, his endeavouring for three years to be good enough for God to save him was entirely beside the mark. These were the words : “ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh

NOT,

but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,” Romans 4 : 4, 5.

Was it any wonder, after three years of earnest effort to work out for himself a

title for salvation, that he should feel utterly confounded as he listened to this clear declaration of God's revealed mind?

NOT

“ TO HIM THAT WORKETH,”

but

“ TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT.”

If he had been exhorted to work harder, and do better, he could well have understood it; but to hear that the blessing comes “ *to him that worketh not,*” and that God justifies the “ ungodly,” was more than he was prepared for. And strange indeed was it that, in reading the Bible through again and again, he had never noticed it before!

Thank God, however, his eyes were open at last; and, better still, he had the wisdom given him to bow to the truth when he did see it. It was in this gracious way his soul was prepared for the Spirit's message through the next speaker—the one he had really gone to hear. This was the text: “ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever

believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3 : 16.

On this blessed Sent One he did believe. He saw that the blessing did not depend on *his working*, but on *God's giving* and *Christ's suffering*; and gladly he received the welcome message.

The misapprehension of what God had connected with the little word "NOW" had given him three years of fruitless effort to *merit* salvation. The right apprehension of what God had connected with the other little word, "NOT," has since then given him many, many years of solid, settled peace.

George J——'s three years' mistake has been, with many, extended to a life-long blunder. With many, alas! it is to be feared, the discovery of the fatal mistake comes all too late, leaving the soul burdened for eternity with the unbearable remorse that, with them, it had been as the Scriptures had said, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Reader, has such a blunder been yours? Give up at once, then, the thought of

trusting such a faulty foundation, and turn to Christ. He only is able to save. Trust no other refuge. Seek no other merit. Never rest till you are able to say, in heart-broken sincerity and with joyous satisfaction,

“ I stand upon His merit,
I know no safer stand;
Not e'en where glory dwelleth,
In Emmanuel's land.”

“ By grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God : *not of works*, lest any man should boast,” Ephesians 2 : 8, 9.

GEO. CUTTING

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