

The Little Baptist

By J.M. Martin

"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:15

Chapter 6

Mellie At Home - The Baptist Meeting.

After being three years in school, Mellie's parents thought best to keep her at home awhile, that her mind might rest from incessant study. They wisely judged that relaxation was necessary to expand and strengthen her mind. The mind is like the *bow*, if never unstrung, it will lose its elasticity; and it is well that parents pay some attention to the physical, as well as the mental and moral development of their children.

Fortunately, Mrs. Brown did not entertain any of those "straight-laced" notions that would keep a child in seclusion and force it to grow up as a "hot-house plant," deprived of the benefits of sun and air, but, encouraged her children in outdoor exercises. She trained them to habits of industry, and allowed them to run and romp upon the green grass, to ramble in the woods, along the brooks and over the hills, thus cultivating their physical nature. If her children wished to strengthen their voices by singing or hallooing, she did not deem it any violation of propriety. For she would say, "to let children be children is the only way to make them grow up healthy and useful men and women."

After so long confinement in the village school house, Mellie derived great pleasure from outdoor exercises. She, too, took a deep interest in everything relative to the household. The affairs of the kitchen, the garden and the flowers, gave her much pleasant employment. She daily looked after the ducks and chickens, hunted the nests and nourished the young, thus making her time profitable as well as pleasant. She was ever kind to her little sister, who was now large enough to accompany her out to gather flowers, watch the birds, and engage in other amusements. When she became tired of play, she would resort to her books, by which means she advanced some in her studies, beside reading many histories and other valuable books, from which she stored her mind with valuable knowledge. Her Bible, too, was not neglected; but from this she learned new truth day by day. Not confining her investigations by any means to the subject of baptism, she gave to this some attention. The more she read, and the older she grew, the stronger were her convictions that the Bible was, indeed, "a Baptist book." She read and re-read, and pencil marked every text having any allusion to the subject. At her request, her mother agreed to help her to examine in detail every place where baptism was mentioned, and she had all arranged so as to turn to any given text at pleasure.

Frank Brown had been three years at college, but was now at home for a few weeks, when he would return one more year before graduating. He had grown to be a man, and was much improved in appearance. Mrs. Brown felt that no mother was ever blessed with a nobler son, or a more sprightly daughter. Except little Anna, who was then

prattling around her knees, these were her only surviving children. Death had taken off several in their infancy, and it is not strange, therefore, that her affections were set, almost to idolatry, on the surviving ones.

Col. Brown being a man of business, and much of his time away from home, the chief responsibility of training the children devolved upon his wife. She was, however, aided much by his counsels; and her course with them was mainly in accordance with their mutual convictions and plans. Yet, from a greater intimacy with their mother, and her sympathies entering at all times more fully into theirs, the children looked almost exclusively to her for counsel. Therefore, the first impressions were made by the mother. She instilled into their minds principles of the strictest virtue and morality, and had labored to arm them with courage against everything of a dishonorable character. She admonished them to always have the courage to do right, and to resist every temptation to any act low or dishonorable. Thus she molded the characters of her offspring while their minds were tender and easily impressed.

Frank had not been long at home, until Mellie told him how distressed she was on reading the Bible that he gave her the day before he started to college; and how she thought he had made a mistake and given her a Baptist Bible; and how mother had convinced her that it was just like any other Bible, and how the school-girls had called her a little Baptist, because she told them that the Bible was a Baptist book; and many other things that had transpired during his absence. Then she told him that "mamma" was going to help her, and they were intending to examine every place in the New Testament where any account was given of persons' being baptized, and she would find out for herself whether the New Testament people were Baptists or Presbyterians.

"But, Mell, suppose you should find that the New Testament people, as you call them, were Baptists," said Frank, "what then?"

"Why, then," replied Mellie, "I'll be a Baptist myself - that's what."

"Pshaw," said Frank, "you surprise me!"

"Now, don't you remember, Buddie," said Mellie, "that when you gave me my Bible, you told me to read it, and that it would tell me what I must do to be good; and that I must obey all that it said and be a good girl? And now, Buddie, don't you want me to do whatever it tells me?"

"O, yes, Mell," said Frank, "but I rather think you are too young yet to set yourself up as a judge of Bible doctrines; notwithstanding, I must confess that you reason like a little philosopher. But as it is the Sabbath day we will not enter into any further discussion. When you and mother begin your investigation of baptism, I will join you, and maybe between us, we can arrive at a correct conclusion. I hope that we will at least get these Baptist notions out of your head."

"All right, Buddie, we'll begin on Monday morning," said Mellie, in a gleeful mood, seeming wholly indifferent as to what the result should be, only so she arrived at the truth. The ringing of the bell at the Baptist church caused Frank to start from his seat.

He remarked to his mother that he would go to church; that as Dr. Farnsworth was sick, and the Methodist minister was away, all the people would go to the Baptist church, and that as he wished to see all his friends after his long absence, going to the Baptist church was *the very idea*.

Mellie came running to ask "mamma" to let her "go with Buddie to the Baptist meeting;" and Mrs. Brown said that she would go along too; "For," said she, "Mr. Coleman preaches some very good sermons, and I like to hear him, *if he is a Baptist*."

Arriving at the church they found a large congregation. The house could not seat all the people and some stood up while others were forced to go away.

Although the Baptists had an unfavorable beginning in the town, they had steadily increased until they now numbered more actual members than any other denomination in the place, and had received into their communion some of the best and most influential citizens of the community. When Mr. Coleman first settled among them, he was quite a young man, and for a time attracted but little attention from people outside his own church; but being a man of great energy and unblemished piety, he made great improvement, and had remarkable success. He was now, as a pulpit orator, second to no minister in the place, although the Presbyterian pastor had been favored with a thorough literary and theological course, and had also been honored with the title of Doctor of Divinity.

On this occasion, Mr. Coleman preached a very plain, practical sermon, earnest and Scriptural. His theme was "The Spirituality of the Christian Religion;" in comparison with which Priest-craft and Ritualism suffered severely. He removed all the supports from those who were trusting in ordinances and outward performances, and showed most clearly that true religion had to do with the heart - the affections, and not with outward show. That to be saved required an internal condition, produced not by external service, but by the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

The sermon ended, he announced that after a few moments for preparation he would attend to the ordinance of baptism. And while he had gone into the vestry to prepare for the service, two of his deacons rolled back the pulpit, exposing to view a beautiful font of pure water. The pastor made but few remarks, only saying that "in the earliest age of Christianity, streams and lakes were usually resorted to, but the essential object was to have a sufficiency of water in which to perform the action of baptism. But we may go back far into the past, even to the latter days of the apostles, and there we find that baptistries were especially prepared simply because it is more convenient to perform this service in the church, and the purpose is as well answered as if in the Jordan, on whose waters the Saviour was baptized. The object of baptism is obedience to Christ; the action is to declare, *emblematically*, a death to sin and a resurrection to a new life. Three things are necessary to Scriptural Baptism: First, a qualified officer of the church to administer it; secondly, a believing subject; thirdly, *an immersion in water*."

When the candidate came forward, it was none other than Laura Thompson, little Mellie's school-mate, who had been the first to call her the "Little Baptist." The minister took her. As silence reigned throughout the congregation, little Mellie said, "Mamma,

that looks like the Bible way of doing it;" to which Mrs. Brown only replied by biting her lips and shaking her head, giving Mellie to understand that it was not a proper time nor place for remarks. Although Mellie was noted for precision of manners, there were times when it seemed impossible for her to prevent her tongue from speaking the thoughts of her mind.

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