

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 4

Mellie At School.

When the morning came for Mr. Hamilton to open his school, Mellie Brown was there at an early hour, with her satchel of books, eager to begin her lessons. After a short examination, Mr. Hamilton permitted her to enter the class of her choice. She was found to be equal to many who were much her senior, and who had spent much more time at school.

Mellie soon became a great favorite in the school, and especially so of her teacher. Mr. Hamilton was not long in discovering her rare mental capacity, and in appreciating her genial and lovely disposition. And it was not at all strange that he conceived for her a feeling of partiality; not that he let this make any difference in his treatment of her and the others, but, with superior merit on her side, he gave her extra attention, yet with no design of invidious discriminations. Mellie was highly attractive: small for her age, a beautiful face, a bright countenance, her every look and action revealing a mild and pleasant temperament.

In her deportment, she was systematic and orderly. At her studies she was expert and energetic. No bad marks were ever given her for misconduct; but when a prize was offered in her class, she was generally the fortunate contestant, because she never failed to *try*, and always *did her* best. Often she might be heard singing:

"If you find your task is hard - Try, try again;
Time will bring you your reward - Try, try again;
All that other folks can do,
Why with patience may not you?
Only keep this rule in view, Try, try again."

An intimacy soon grew up between her and her teacher, so that she felt no hesitancy in asking him questions. Often her questions were touching some person or doctrine in the Bible. She always carried her Bible with her, and daily read it as circumstances would admit; and when alone she would mark texts to have explained by her mother or teacher at some convenient time.

Mr. Hamilton frequently required his school to read a chapter in the Bible as part of the morning exercises, and it was not at all unusual for Mellie to interrupt the reading by some impromptu question, which it seemed she could not restrain. This practice, though not in accord with strict propriety, was tolerated in her because of her simplicity and honesty of purpose, as well as the kind, ingenious and confiding manner in which she

would ask the questions. The teacher often answered in a way to profit all the school, and imparted much useful information to his pupils that he never would have done but for the inquisitive, *thinking* little Mellie Brown.

One morning the New Testament lesson was the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and it happened to come Mellie's time to read the thirty-eighth verse, which describes the scene of Philip going down into the water to baptize the eunuch. She finished the verse and stood in deep reflection while the next in the class read: "And when they were come up out of the water," etc. Mellie, as if moved by some irresistible emotion, put a stop to the reading by saying: "Mr. Hamilton, Philip was a Baptist, wasn't he?"

Taken by surprise, Mr. Hamilton was confused for a time, but reflecting a little he replied:

"Well, it does look a little like he might have been, but why, Mellie do you wish to know that?"

"Because," said Mellie, " I just thought that he baptized the man like the Baptists baptize people, and I suppose he must have been a Baptist."

"I can't say about that," said Mr. Hamilton, "this is a subject of controversy in the churches, and as it is not my business to teach sectarianism, nor to have such topics discussed in my school, we will proceed at once with the lesson."

Mellie received many *cutting* winks and looks from the other pupils, and, of course, felt severely rebuked by the summary manner in which her question had been disposed of. Mr. Hamilton acted only from prudential reasons in bringing the matter to a hasty conclusion, yet he enjoyed the novelty of having the exercises of his school suspended for a discussion on the subject of baptism, and often referred to it as "a good joke" on his school. But to show the little questioner that he was not offended with her, he called her to him at recess, and said, "Come now, Mellie, if you are willing, we will talk some more about Philip's being a Baptist."

Mellie approached him with more than usual diffidence, but when she was assured that her motives were appreciated, and her little impropriety excused, she mustered courage to again ask Mr. Hamilton if he did not think that Philip baptized the man just like the Baptists baptize people, he evaded by saying:

"Why Mellie, I thought you were a good little Presbyterian; are you about to turn Baptist? If you do, what will your Ma and Dr Farnsworth say to it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Hamilton," said Mellie, "I never thought about being anything now, but when I get older and understand all about the Bible, I am going to do whatever it says. But it appears to me that the Bible is a Baptist book anyway, for almost every place that baptism is mentioned, it was in a river or at a place of much water, and it tells about the people going down into and coming up out of the water. That's the way my Bible reads, and mamma says that it is just like other Bibles. Buddie gave it to me, and when I read

it, I thought there was some mistake about it: that some Baptist had printed it just to make Baptists of the people, because it reads so much like they preach and practice; but it is exactly like Laura Thompson's and Nannie Gordon's, and I guess it must be right. But Mr. Hamilton won't you tell me what you think?"

"No, Mellie, I don't teach school to influence my pupils one way or the other about such questions as baptism. You can read your Bible and act according to its instructions, or else your parents and the preachers must teach you. I have no doubt that when you get older, you will be able to form satisfactory conclusions for yourself. I advise you to persevere in your investigations, and learn all that you can about the Bible, and I am sure that my little pet will be willing to do whatever her Bible teaches her is right."

"Yes, that I will do; Buddie told me to read the Bible, and to do whatever it said do, and I'm going to stick to the lines I learned in my little primer when I was only five years old:

"My book and heart,
Shall never part;"

and if my little Bible does turn out to be a Baptist book, why, then, I'm going to be a little Baptist, *sure enough*."

As it was near the time for school, Mr. Hamilton walked out for a little recreation, and the girls who had been listening to the conversation, began to ridicule Mellie for what they were pleased to call her "impertinence" and "presumption." Katy Jones exclaimed, "La, Mell, you going to be a Baptist, and your ma a Presbyterian! Why, what will folks think?"

"I know what I'll think," said Mellie, "I'll think it's nobody's business. If my Bible makes me a little Baptist, why then, I'll be a Baptist, and that's all of it. But let us get to our lessons before the teacher returns, just to show him how much we want to learn."

But Katy Jones and Laura Thompson began to tantalize her, and to call her, "The little Baptist;" and asked her if she hadn't better send back to Jerusalem and get Philip to come and baptize her, and a great many other things equally absurd; but the unexpected entrance of the teacher restored order, and a gentle tap of his bell summoned all to their lessons.

Mellie felt that it was very unkind in the girls to tease her so for her honest expressions, yet she did not weep or pout, as many girls would have done. She thought as little about it as possible, and when the time came for reciting her lesson, she was not behind any in the class. When she returned home in the evening, she spent a short time playing with her dolls. After re-arranging some of her dresses, and putting all in order, she placed them smugly in a little box for their night's rest. Then she must go and see that the little ducks and chickens were fed and housed for the night; and after she had asked her mother many questions about the affairs of the kitchen, garden and various interests, she was ready to take her little sister Anna out for an evening walk.

By the time these rounds were through, her mind was pretty well rested from the labors of the day, and she was ready to apply herself to the lesson that she must recite the

next morning. She had at this time an unusually hard lesson, and her mind not being altogether free from the conflicts of the day, it was late before she was sure that her lesson was prepared, and she was summoned to bed before she thought of putting by her books. When she went to kiss her mother "good night," she said: "Mamma, I think the girls treated me very unkindly today; I would not have thought that they would have done so."

"Who, dear?"

"Why, Laura Thompson, and all the big girls; and all because I asked Mr. Hamilton something about the reading in the Bible."

And she gave an account of what had occurred over the New Testament lesson, and how the girls ridiculed her and called her "The little Baptist," but said she, "I am not going to care for it, but will study hard and try to beat every one of them. I'll show them that if I am the least one in the class, I know how to do right; and I won't care for it."

Mrs. Brown, always proud of her daughter, felt flattered afresh by this additional evidence of Mellie's superiority. She spoke approvingly of her determination, and told her that the best way to treat mockers and tattlers was to live and act above the reach of their influence.

"But, mamma," said Mellie, "I think I have learned something from the Bible about the right way to treat the girls when they make fun of me. It teaches me to do good for evil."

"Yes," said Mrs. Brown, "and it says that you must forgive those that wrong you - or sin against you."

"Yes, it does, mamma; I've read it; and it says if we don't forgive those who trespass against us, our Heavenly Father will not forgive us. Then I'll forgive the girls, for you know I must do whatever my Bible tells me to do. That's right, isn't it, mamma?"

Mellie scarcely heard her mother's approving answer, for she had hardly finished the sentence until she was quietly sleeping, and did not awake until the light of another day came peeping in at her window. Rising quickly and dressing, she hurried out to release the ducks and chickens from the little prisons to which she had consigned them for the night; then she paid a visit to her box of dolls to see that no old rat had intruded on her interesting little family; next a romp over the house with little Anna and the kittens, and she was ready to go about preparing her toilet for breakfast. After breakfast her lesson must be reviewed, then she was off to school.

Arriving at the school-house, she found many of her class in advance of her, and this morning the teacher was unusually late. Mellie was greeted on all sides by the girls with "Good morning, little Baptist." "How do you do, little Baptist?" and, "I hope the little Baptist is well this morning;" to all of which she returned a pleasant "Good morning," and walking to her desk, quietly deposited her books. She then said: "How have you all succeeded with that hard lesson? I suppose, though, you are all ready to recite, as you appear to be idle."

"We don't look for you to have a good lesson this morning, Mell," said Katy Jones, "for know you have not studied it; you've been reading that Baptist Bible. But, of course, Mr. Hamilton will excuse you, *under the circumstances*."

"Yes, *of course*," said Laura Thompson, "Mr. Hamilton will excuse *her* for anything, as she's his *little pet*." Turning to Nannie Gordon she said: "I do believe that Mr. Hamilton thinks that Mell is a little piece of perfection, and I shall not be surprised if he makes her an assistant teacher in the school before long. You can all see that whatever she does is exactly right; and then, *she knows it all* - all that is worth knowing."

"A pretty assistant teacher she would make," said Nelly Perkins; "now wouldn't she cut a figure explaining that Bible?"

"I rather guess," said Alice Green, "that she would be better on asking questions, than in giving explanations."

"Yes, the little inquisitive Miss," said Mellie Turner; "she is a very nice size for an interrogation point, and that's the use I'd put her to, if I were Mr. Hamilton. I would put her up somewhere in the house as a sign of inquisitiveness."

The teacher entered, and the young ladies were forced to retire from the attack, mortified, too, because they had failed to stir up resentment, or cause her to speak a single word in retaliation. The girls had exhibited a spirit that could only have been the offspring of envy and jealousy, which had been engendered because Mellie had outstripped them all in gaining the respect and attention of the teacher. Mellie felt that it was no fault of hers that her teacher had treated her with more attention than he had extended to others, therefore she disregarded their taunts and jeers, and went about her lessons with perfect self-possession.

Several days passed during which the girls tried every means to vex Mellie into resentment. Whenever they could catch her eye they would point their fingers, or make ugly mouths at her, or do something else to try to aggravate her. But all to no purpose. Sometimes she would say to them:

"Be you to others kind and true,
As you would have them be to you."

This with other kind replies, the sentiment, if not the language of which she had read in her Bible, gratified all the spirit of revenge she felt.

One day Laura Thompson tried to persuade Mellie to take Sallie Morgan's apples from her basket, when Mellie, with much surprise, exclaimed, "Laura! do you think I would do such a thing as that? I know better than to steal apples. Do you think to make me believe that it would be no harm, when the Bible says, 'Thou shalt not steal'?"

"Pshaw," said Laura; "that's nothing, just to take a few apples - nobody will know it."

"God would know it," said Mellie, "and if He did not, I'd be ashamed to see myself do such a thing. I don't need Sallie Morgan's apples, but if I did, I would go and ask her for them, like anybody ought to."

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