

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 14

The Saturday Meeting - Family Consultation

It was a beautiful Saturday morning in the month of May. Everything was astir at Colonel Brown's, getting ready to go to the Baptist meeting. Contrary to the expectations of Mrs. Brown and Mellie, Colonel Brown and Frank declined going with them. When the ladies arrived at the church, they found an unusually large congregation for a conference meeting. This church adhered to the old custom of holding a meeting once a month on Saturday, to attend to the general business of the church.

It has been said that "coming events cast their shadows before;" and at this time anticipations, that had ripened into a correct report, had spread over the community, to the effect that Mrs. Brown and Mellie would join the church on that day, hence the large congregation. Many were there, prompted by mere curiosity, while some had gone in the capacity of spies, to take notes and report proceedings. The pastor preached a calm, dispassionate sermon, on "Christian duty," which he discussed in three divisions: 1st. "Duty to God," 2nd. "Duty to the church," and 3rd. "Duty to the world." At the close of the sermon, the usual forms were observed, of inviting the church to sit in conference, and stating that the church was ready to receive applicants for membership. While the church engaged in singing that good old hymn: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound," all eyes were turned in the direction of Mrs. Brown and Mellie, who sat with so much composure, that a general disappointment was visible all over the house. But while singing the fourth stanza, and after the words: His word my hope secures, Mellie arose alone, and with a calm, deliberate movement, evincing a fixed and steady purpose, took the designated seat. The pastor asked her to relate some evidences of her change of heart, which she proceeded to do in a voice so distinct, as to be plainly heard by the congregation. She said:

"I grew up, believing that nature and education had given me all the qualifications for happiness that I needed, but by reading the Bible and becoming better informed, I found this to be untrue. My conscience bore testimony to the fact that I was a condemned sinner, meriting only the displeasure of God. I sought to gain His favor by good deeds, and by various means that all proved unavailing, until by long and bitter repentance, I was led to the cross of Christ. There prostrated in the depths of humility, pleading the merits of Him who died for me, and trusting and believing in Him, I found peace for my soul. I felt that I was accepted of Him, and my sins pardoned. I felt no longer burdened on account of sin, but happy in a Saviour's love. I feel today that to thank God that He lef me out of the delusions of sin, into this glorious light of His love. And though I have often since then felt a remorse of conscience for the neglect of duty, I have nevermore

felt that sense of condemnation, as I once did. I feel that I love my Saviour, and I wish to follow Him, and in obedience to His command, be baptized, to be united with His people, and to serve Him while I live on earth."

No questions were asked, as all were satisfied ; and she was, by a vote of the church, unanimously received as a proper subject for baptism after submitting to which, as the initiatory rite she would be entitled to all the privileges as a member of the church.

After returning home, Mrs. Brown informed her husband that it was Mellie's intention to be baptized the next day, and also told him that she had nearly made the decision to be baptized herself; that she felt it her duty to do so, and that her conscience could not be easy until she discharged this duty. To which Colonel Brown replied:

"I see no necessity nor reason for making this ado in the community, by changing your church relations in your old age. My family for several generations, have lived and died Presbyterians, and I trust that the most of them, at least, have gone to heaven. If *they* could go to heaven Presbyterians, why may not you, as well?"

"Well," said she, "I hope that all your relatives that are passed away have gone to heaven, but what has that to do with my duty to my Saviour? With me, it is not a question of going to heaven, but *only a question of duty*. I am not, as a Christian, a mere hireling, proposing to do certain things, for which I am to receive heaven as a reward. Salvation is a gift, but it is my duty to obey my Lord and Master."

"I know," said he, "that there is nothing to be gained by arguing the questions with you, so do as you please. And as regards Mellie, you know that I have always said, 'her and her Bible for it.' I was anxious to see what would be a child's conclusion on the baptismal question, from reading the Bible free from all restraints, and prejudice. The problem is now about to be worked out, and I shall not object to her following her own judgment in the matter. She thinks that she is right, and she may do whatever she feels to be her duty. Whatever prejudice my education has given me, is against the Baptists, yet I am bound to admit that they are a very respectable denomination, and if what all history says of them is true, they are the most ancient denomination in existence. Except for the Roman Catholics, the Baptists are the most permanent religious organization in the world; because, resting their faith and practice alone on the Bible, and rejecting all creeds and or systems of human invention, they are less liable to change than others, whose Conferences and Synods are authorized to legislate and change their rules and practices as policy may dictate. The Baptists have flourished in all countries when not under the ban of proscription, and here in America, they bid fair to become the largest and most powerful denomination in the country.

"I have often thought that if precisely the same influences were brought to bear upon every person alike, there would not be half the difference in opinions that there is in religion. If all could be divested of the prejudices of education, there would be much more harmony in the interpretation of the Scriptures, and the great number of sects would be merged into one grand Scriptural Church. The different sects propagate the different notions, and thus the world is diverging from, rather than approaching harmony. But the Presbyterians are more respectable than the Baptists. Their

preachers are more learned, and they hold higher rank in society, at least in this region."

Colonel Brown was a logical thinker, and well versed in the current history of the time; but he had a way of looking at every subject in the light of worldly interests, and worldly ambition. Rank in society was a grand idea with him. Every step was measured by the advantages to be gained by it. He courted popularity for himself, and was very jealous of every act of his family that might have a prejudicial influence. In this instance he saw that submission would be better than resistance, as to the effect on the public mind; so he acquiesced in his wife's decision, and promised to accompany her to the church on the next day, to appear, at least, that he made no serious opposition to the course his wife and daughter were taking.

Finding matters entirely beyond his control, Frank resolved to endure it all with as good grace as he possibly could, though he was far from approving the course of his mother and sister. Like his father he saw the wisdom of patiently enduring what he could not prevent, and ceased to cast any reflection upon them, further than was expressed by a very sad countenance. But there was another person in the family who took a very different view of matters; this was old Aunt Polly, the colored woman who had been a regular employee in the family as a house woman and cook. She came into the family room, saying:

"Bless de Lord! I's so glad de Missus and Miss Mellie is gwine to be Baptists. I'se been a Baptist thirty years, an' I know 'twill do; nobody's gwine to be dissatisfied wid der baptism after dat."

"Why is it, Aunt Polly," said Mrs. Brown, "that you colored people are nearly all Baptists?"

"Lor Missus," she replied, "black person mity ignorant, but dey loves de truth. Den, you knows, dey have been raised to 'bey de commands of der Master, an' dey think of nothing else but to do as dey are told. So when dey become servants of Christ, all dey ask is what he have 'em do; and when dey see him go down into de river to be baptized, and den hear him say, 'follow me,' dey go right along an' 'bey him, without trying to do some oder way, and den say dey didn't know no better."

"That's right, Aunt Polly," said Mellie, "stick to the commandments and you will make no mistakes."

"Yes, bless you chile," said she, "I never know'd dat you were such a strong Baptist before de day you talked wid dat Camerlite preacher. It done dis ole soul good to hear you; I des laft all over."

"Why, did you hear me talking to Dr. Atwood, Aunt Polly?" asked Mellie.

"Ah!" said she, "you're rite, I did. You see I finished cleanin' up de kitchen, and den I slip aroun' to hear what you all talkin' 'bout; an' when I hear you talkin' sich strong Baptist talk, I slip behind de door an' hear all you say. I'se so proud you sich a true Baptist; but I jes 'spected dat, when, long time ago, I saw you readin' dat little Bible so much; an'

many times dis ole soul prayed for dat, an' her prayers are now answered, thank the Lord."

"You don't seem to like the Campbellites much, I see," said Mellie.

"Whoopee! dis ole darkey'll never be no Camerlite. No, never. I knows too much 'bout 'spermental religion for dat. People dat have larnin may talk about *doing* religion, an' working der way to heaven, but I can't see how dat is. I'se very ignorant, an' if I'se to 'pend on doing everything jes right, I might miss somethings an' den when I go to heaven dey not let me in. I wants dat good, old fashioned religion dat I can feel, for when I'se happy I knows it, and feels I'se in de right road. It is little dat I knows 'bout de readin' of de Bible, but der is one text dat I wouldn't give for al der Camerlite preachin' in de world. It's 'By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is de gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.' Wise people may know some oder way to heaven, but dis ole soul is going to 'pend on Christ for de Saviour - she is now, shore ah! when I hear a person say dat dare is no sich ting as a 'sperience of grace, it proves dat dey knows nothin' 'bout it, like demselves. Faith in de Lord, and grace in de soul; dat's de 'complishment for heaven - 'tis now shore."

Frank, who had been listening to these remarks, asked, "What is faith, Aunt Polly?"

"Lor, chile," said she, "dat's de easist ting 'splained in de world. It is to take God at his word; to trust in his promises; to hold fast, an' never let 'em go. We don't try to do nothin' 'ceptin we have faith, but wid faith we can do all tings. Now don't you remember chile, when you was drivin' out in de carriage, an' comin' to de ole bridge on de creek, you were afraid to cross it. You thought maybe it was rotten, so you didn't have faith in it; an' you was gwine to hunt some oder way home, but a man happened to come along an' told you dat de brigge was sound an' safe, so you took his word for the truth; you have *faith*, you 'pend on de bridge, you drive on it, an' come over safe an' sound. Now your faith caused you to go forward an' get over de creek, an' dats what I call saving faith. Christ is able to save everybody, an' if we have faith to venture on him, he will carry us safely over de stream of death, to de promised land. But if we have no faith in him an' try to find some oder way, he will not take us over no more dan de bridge did you while you would not venture on it for lack of faith. Long time ago I didn't have faith, den I sees heaps of troubles. I felt dat I was lost, an' I didn't know how to find de way; but when I have faith, my troubles all gone, an' I feel glad. To have faith is to 'pend on de Saviour, to trust him, have confidence in him, an' venture on him an' never let him go."

"O, yes Aunt Polly," said Frank, "that all sounds very nice - it's quite an easy way, perhaps; but I thought that a while ago you were going to be saved by obedience - by obeying the commands. Is not this your doctrine?"

"Lor, chile," said she, "whenever you have faith, an' 'pend on de Saviour, an' feel dat your sins are pardoned, den you gwine to love dat Saviour an' try to 'bey him - dat's de gospel, chile. Den you'll want to be baptized, too, because he has commanded it. But people who go an' be baptized, an' 'bey de commands all because dey 'fraid of going to hell, won't never get in heaven for dat - now dat's shore. Long ago, when 'us cullered'

folks were in slavery, on ole Master's plantation, some of de black persons 'beyed orders an' (part of de time) worked first rate, just because dey were 'fraid of de lash; but dem were de meanest black persons on de plantation; you couldn't trust dem out of your sight. But some of 'em loved ole Master, an' delighted in 'beying orders an' working for him. Because dey loved him dey wanted to please him. Dem black persons would do to trust anywhere. An' dats de way it is about serving de Lord. All dat jes 'bey commands 'cause dey 'fraid of hell, or to please de world or make 'emselves popular, don't love God - have no confidence in him, and he has no confidence in dem. Dey are hypocrites - an' *dat's what's de matter.*"

Aunt Polly was conscientiously honest, and her deportment showed her to be a genuine Christian. One of the features distinguishing the ushering in of the gospel era, was "the poor have the gospel preached unto them"; and a highly commendable feature of that gospel, is, that it is plain and simple that the unlettered, as well as the learned, may comprehend its principles and realize its benefits. Of Christ it is said, "the common people heard him gladly." While Aunt Polly could not read the Bible, enough of it had been taught to her for her to understand the principles of the gospel plan of salvation; and in relation to the experimental evidences of Christianity, she knew as much as the wisest; for Jesus said of His people, "they shall be all taught of God." She walked by faith, trusting to the internal evidence of the Spirit to assure her of her acceptance with God; and with a never flagging hope pointing her mind upward and a zeal for the Master's cause that never grew cold, she went humbly forward in the discharge of her duties, bearing daily testimony to the truth, that true religion has in it a power to control the conduct of its possessors. She was one of the few of her race that abhorred the wild fanaticism that so frequently characterizes their meetings, and adhered to a consistent life of faith and humility. She accepted her sphere in life; tried to do her duty to both God and man; and had the confidence of all who knew her.

Those who choose one sect because of its aristocracy, and reject another because of the humble sphere of some of its adherents, may learn a lesson from this incident related by Mr. Spurgeon: An aristocrat professor of the religion of the humble Saviour, was on her death bed, and her pastor came to comfort her. As he talked to her of that glorious heaven in which she hoped soon to dwell, she interrupted him by saying: "My dear pastor, are there not two places in heaven? one for me, and one for Betsey in the kitchen? She is so unrefined!" The pertinent answer was: "You need not concern yourself, my sister, about the arrangements in heaven, for you will never get there unless you get clear of your cursed pride."

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