

MABEL CLEMENT

by

J. M. SALLEE

ECONOMY PRINTERS ASHLAND, KENTUCKY

CHAPTER THREE

The beautiful sunshine came glimmering through the half stripped boughs of the trees in Mrs. Fields' yard, making everything look bright and cheerful, on the day after Mabel's conversion. Two or three birds, as if vying with each other in sweetness of song, were making the place vocal with music. The joyful song of the feathery tribe was in unison with the spirit of our heroine. She thought, as she stepped out into the veranda and saw the light streaming through the tree tops and stood listening to the delightful music of the birds, that the world was more beautiful to her than ever before. It seemed that GOD was speaking to her through the light, the song and everything around her in the great world.

While her heart was thus going out to her GOD and Saviour through His works, she was roused from her reverie by her aunt, who had just learned that a near neighbor was expected to die. Mabel and her aunt were soon off to the chamber of the dying to witness the death of one of GOD's saints.

When they entered, the dying woman was talking calmly to her husband and children, who were weeping around her. She was entreating them not to weep after her, to trust in and obey the Saviour, and to meet her in Heaven. She beckoned to Mrs. Fields, who approached her bedside. As she did so, the dying saint stretched out her hand and said:

"I could not go away without thanking you who have so greatly encouraged and helped me to live the life of a Christian."

"I am grateful to my Heavenly Father," said Mrs. Fields, "if I have been a blessing to you and have comforted and cheered you in the path of duty,"

"Oh! it was hard! It was so hard, Norinda; but thanks to my Saviour for helping me by His all-sufficient grace to take up the cross and bear it. I cannot think of anything in my whole life that I am so thankful for, except the salvation of my soul."

"Melissa," asked Mrs. Fields, "do you feel reconciled to death perfectly?"

"Perfectly," she replied, and the hope of a blissful immortality shone in her countenance and the triumph of faith sparkled in her eyes as she added: "I am depending on the blood of CHRIST alone and I am conscious that is all-sufficient."

Her strength was fast failing, the blood was flowing sluggishly through her veins. "Water," she called; "my time is short, good-by, good-by," She feebly embraced her husband and children

without a tear till she came to the youngest, a sweet little girl of four summers. Her tears flowed freely as she folded her babe to her bosom, commending her to the care of her companion and her GOD. Every one in the room was weeping bitterly. She asked them to sing.

"How firm a foundation ye saints!"

While it was being sung she seemed to lose sight of earth. Her last words were these: "My Saviour abides with me. Glory, glory! All is well,"

Without a struggle her spirit passed away to her GOD. She was ready and waiting for the call of her Master, anxious to go when He beckoned. She was not like the school boy who must be driven from his play, but like one wearied of it and ready to go to bed. She was like the mariner who is ready for the voyage, who the moment the wind is favorable weighs anchor, full of hope and joy, and launches into the deep.

When they were seated around the fireside at Mrs. Fields' at night, talking of the deceased neighbor and bereaved family, Mabel inquired of her aunt:

"What did she allude to that was so hard and for which she was so thankful?"

"She was once a Methodist." was the reply; "and became convinced by studying the Bible that she had never been baptized. She felt it her duty to unite with the Baptist church and *follow her Saviour in the ordinance of baptism, being buried with Him and raised to exhibit newness of life. But to do this she had to forsake her husband, father, mother and all her relatives. This was hard, very hard for her to do. The struggle was severe;* and, though greatly censured by her friends, she was, by the help of divine grace enabled to do what she believed was necessary in order to obey her Saviour. It was this that she was so thankful for in her last hour. Those duties which require the greatest amount of sacrifice, and those crosses that are heaviest to bear, are the greatest source of comfort to us in life and death and eternity."

Mabel lay awake a long time that night thinking. She had felt that it was her duty to make known her faith to the world by attaching herself to the Baptist church; but, after turning the matter over in her mind, she had concluded to remain where she was as it did not make much difference, she reckoned, anyway, since she was now a true Christian. But since hearing the cause of that dead saint's gratitude was *her following the Saviour faithfully when it was hard*, Mabel's mind was greatly disturbed. She was undecided as to what course to pursue.

Whenever she studied up her duty abstractly, she could see plainly she ought to unite with the Baptist church; but when she reflected that she must forsake her parents and all her friends, her faith staggered, her purpose of duty wavered, and she felt it would be hard, next to impossible to leave her present moorings. How could she ever return to Sterling, face all the people and bear all the remarks! No, surely there was an easier, smoother way for her to serve her Lord. There was, however, a passage of Scripture which Herbert had read before they knelt in prayer, preparatory to retiring, which Mabel had in vain tried to get rid of. It was this: **"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me... And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me."** (Matthew 10:37,38). She thought also of that kindred passage in Luke 14:26,27. These texts, teaching her GOD must be first in her heart and life, fixed

themselves tenaciously in her mind and lay like a burden of lead on her heart. She promised herself she would decide what was her duty and do it.

She slept, but awoke with that Scripture in her mind. After another struggle, she decided she would at some future time profess her faith in CHRIST and the doctrines as she then understood them by uniting with the Baptist church, but said she would go home and consult her parents first. She thus tried to quiet her conscience and dismiss the matter from her mind; but she was still restless. She opened her Bible to read and the first passage that met her eyes was this: "**Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.**" (Galatians 1:16). This seemed to be from the Lord. It overwhelmed her with trembling and anxiety.

A copious shower of tears flowed down her lovely cheeks. Then she grew more calm and thoughtful. The expression of her countenance changed rapidly. It was evident a great struggle was going on in her mind. The battle raged and the issue was doubtful. But pride and fear were battled down at last; truth and right prevailed; and she firmly resolved, GOD helping her, she would offer herself for membership in the Baptist church at the first opportunity.

Her conscience was now at ease. She knelt and committed herself and her way to GOD. She then arose and sought her aunt and cousin and calmly revealed to them her purpose. They were greatly rejoiced and even moved to tears by the solemn and affecting words of Mabel. They had deeply desired this; but knew they would be charged with proselyting if they said anything; and so left the matter with Mabel and her GOD. Mabel's resolve was carried into effect the following Lord's day. She was approved for baptism after she had been examined with regard to conversion.

It was with emotions of the deepest joy and gratitude that she was baptized, not in order to the remission of her sins, but to set forth, first, the burial and resurrection of JESUS, second, her death to sin and hence freedom from it, and third, her resurrection to newness of life. As she came up out of the water, she felt that she had not only acknowledged allegiance to her KING, but had acknowledged before the world that she belonged to CHRIST wholly, that henceforth her life was to be devoted to Him and spent in His service.

In a few hours after our heroine had been baptized, her mind turned to Sterling and her imagination painted the look of astonishment on the faces of her parents and friends. In anticipation, her ears were greeted with the rudest and harshest remarks. Unmitigated, sarcastic rebukes were heaped on her head in the most relentless manner. She passed through the crucible of all the un pitying critics of the town. What must she do? Must she passively, tacitly submit to all the reproach and contumely that people might see fit to cast at her?

She thought she could do it, if it would best subserve the interests of her Master's Kingdom; *but her Bible taught her to let her light shine, to hold forth the word of life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.* Then her parents, Arthur and her best friends at Sterling possibly were in the same deluded condition that she was anterior to her coming to Thornton. If so she ought to rescue them at the cost of her happiness. What course must she pursue was the perplexing problem. After much prayer and thought, she matured a plan which she deemed best under all the circumstances. It was to prepare to thoroughly and successfully vindicate the step she had taken if necessary.

She disclosed her plan and purpose to her aunt and cousin, and secured their promise of assistance in the preparation. She and Herbert entered heartily and enthusiastically into the work. Mabel began an earnest and persistent search of the Scriptures. She also had the use of some other books that were very helpful on various subjects. Her aim was to prepare for any question that might arise; *but especially did she labor to be able to prove by the Word of GOD that baptism is celebrative, declarative instead of procurative.* Her stay was lengthened out from three to eight weeks.

The news of her becoming a Baptist had soon reached Sterling and her parents were almost ashamed for her to come home. They had no thought that their child was so fickle. The news fairly stunned them. Mr. Clement could not go down to the store for several days, though important business was on hand; and Mrs. Clement did not visit for several weeks and was too indisposed to see a number of visitors. They did not care if Mabel stayed at Thornton six months. Both parents were heart-sick.

Arthur was greatly astonished and grieved. He did not say anything; he did not know what to say; but he could not bear to hear persons speak lightly of Mabel. His bosom would heave and his cheeks would burn with indignation. He wrote to Mabel, asking an explanation of her conduct. Here is a portion of his letter:

"My Dear Miss Clement:

"I received your last on my return home today. And you have joined the Baptists! The news almost took my breath! To say the least it astounds me. I do not remember that I was ever more surprised. This act of yours has struck some of us dumb and amazed the town. Your name is on all lips. I regret you did not consult your father and mother, or Dr. Stanly, or even myself, before taking the step you did. I think you might have been dissuaded from it."

To say this letter pained Mabel is to put it very mildly. At first she felt indignant, then her emotions got the better of her and she threw herself on the bed and wept. Presently she arose, relieved and calmed after the storm that had swept over her soul, and answered Arthur's letter. She felt blue, but was brave.

Her reply contained these words:

"My Bible teaches me that the only one to consult about my religious duties is my Saviour; that it is not necessary to confer with flesh and blood; and that when duty is once known, parents, friends and kindred must not stand in the way of its performance. Do not think that I have acted thoughtlessly or unadvisedly. It was the hardest struggle of my life; and the step was not taken without counting the cost and without sleepless nights and much prayer and searching of the Scriptures. I believe GOD has guided me and feel sure I can give good reasons for what I have done."

This puzzled Arthur. She had never written in such a tone before. Surely some change had come into her heart as well as her life. His heart softened as he thought over the letter and the great mental struggle she must have passed through in getting the consent of her mind to leave the church of her father and mother and join the Baptists, the sect everywhere spoken against. His heart grew tender and his sympathies flowed out to the beautiful girl. But how could she be so

misled by those ignorant Baptists? He had thought her brilliant and strong intellectually. Was he mistaken?

Just then Mr. Tibbs, a lawyer friend, came into his office.

"Hello! Tibbs, take a seat. Say, had you heard Clement joining the Baptists?"

"No, are you sure of it?"

"Yes, she tells me in a letter."

"And you correspond? Well, she is a pretty girl; but if she is that dull, or fickle, or fanatical, you better leave her be. I never want any relations to that sect."

Arthur made no reply. He thought and thought and wondered what he would do. The vision of her sweet face came up before his mind and he could not feel harshly toward her; and, recollecting their friendly tilts in the past and her skillful sparring, together with her sober, firm adherence to what she believed right, he could not believe her either fickle, or fanatical.

~ end of chapter 3 ~
