

MABEL CLEMENT

by

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CHAPTER TWO

Journey to Thornton - Mabel's Aunt Norinda Fields, sister to Mabel's mother, and her two children, Ethel (married) and Herbert (just decided to preach) Jacob Fields dead 14 years - Sermon on Grace - Sermon on HOLY SPIRIT - Mabel uneasy - Herbert licensed to preach - Aunt Juda - Christian Experience - Sense of forgiveness - Herbert preaches - Mabel converted - Churches of CHRIST

The first rays of the rising sun were gilding the hill-tops around Sterling and lifting the dense fog that overhung the town, when the horn of the old stage coach sounded; and in a little while it rolled up before the beautiful mansion of Mr. Clement. Mabel and her baggage were soon hustled out and into the vehicle. While taking leave of her friends, some one on the street below saluted her. It was Arthur, who had been standing there for half an hour to get a glimpse of her before her departure.

Although the road to Thornton was anything but smooth, Mabel enjoyed it very much. She was just turned into her nineteenth year, had a lively imagination, was sanguine of everything bright and pleasant, and drank in greedily the rich scenes that appeared successively as they passed through the mountainous region of country that lay between Sterling and Thornton. She seemed to draw near the Almighty through His works. She admired everything that displayed GOD's handiwork from the least unto the greatest. She saw the glory of GOD in the tiny, uncultivated flowers that grew modestly on the roadside and loaded the air with fragrant perfume. From the flowers her mind rose to the more bulky objects of nature, -the trees, the mountains and the great world.

Then she thought what a little part of GOD's creation is this world, of the countless worlds that float in the deep blue sky, of the sun a million miles in diameter and a million times larger than our world. Such thoughts filled her mind with a reverential awe of Him who is the Maker and Builder of all things. Thus meditating upon the beautiful and the sublime in nature, the time she was on the road passed by swiftly and did not at all seem tedious. Those that are thoughtful and studious of what can be seen around them seldom find time hard to get rid of; for such the hours are ever too short.

The stage drew up in front of her aunt's country home shortly after noon. Her cousin, Herbert, opened the coach door and gave her a warm welcome. Her smiling and warm-hearted aunt led her in while Herbert, assisted by a servant, followed with her baggage. In a short time they all dined sumptuously on the best dinner Aunt Juda (an old servant who had been connected with the family for many years) could get up with the assistance of Mrs. Fields. Mabel soon found herself pleasantly situated in the home of her aunt.

I must now tell you something about the family with which our heroine is to reside some weeks. Norinda Fields, Mabel's aunt, and sister to her mother, was forty-five years of age. She was a genial, kind-hearted, intelligent woman. She was a widow and had been for fourteen years. Her husband at his decease left her two children whom she had raised in a manner that was creditable to her. She had given both a pretty thorough education. Ethel, her daughter, was the older of the two. She was married to a respectable and well-to-do farmer in the neighborhood of Thornton. Herbert was a young man of brilliant intellect and stability of character. Not being content to remain on the farm he had taken up the study of law; but recently he had been impressed with the duty of preaching the Gospel, and the day previous to the arrival of Mabel had told his mother to her great joy that he did not believe he could conscientiously pursue any other calling than that of a minister of JESUS CHRIST.

Mrs. Fields had been praying for this, for she feared the temptations that her noble boy would be exposed to in the practice of law. Her husband, Jacob Fields, had been a pillar, a burdenbearer in the Baptist church at Thornton; and when he died he requested his wife to fill his place as far as she could. From that time she had been a noble worker in the church there. Her heart had become more and more enlisted each year in the Master's service; and she believed no occupation on earth was purer and higher than that to which her son had been called.

Herbert had struggled against this call; but his mother had secretly prayed for years that GOD would call her boy to preach. No wonder then that the mother felt an ecstatic joy when she discovered her son weeping over the text, "**Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel,**" and learned what his tears indicated. Time passed pleasantly at Mrs. Fields'. Mabel found her aunt talkative and agreeable; and Herbert proved to be a very companionable fellow, wearing now and then a somber countenance as he mused on the great responsibilities of life, but for the most part filling the home with sunshine whenever he entered. Ethel and her husband came over during the week and spent a day and night with them. Their visit proved to be quite a treat. She found Ethel to be one of those sunny beings that always see the bright and sunny side of things and seem blind to everything but hopeful outlooks.

On the next Saturday after Mabel's arrival the regular meeting of the Baptist church convened at Thornton. All attended. There was quite a congregation of intelligent people. Many of them did not dress in an up-to-date style; but Mabel judged their mental capacity was not inferior to that of city people. Besides they seemed to be devoutly interested in the service and sermon. There seemed to be more of the atmosphere of real worship than Mabel was accustomed to see. The minister was gray with years. His theme was Grace. *He showed that sinners are not saved by their works, nor for their works; but by grace. He proved also that salvation is not partly by grace and partly by works, but wholly by grace. He closed by showing how deeply indebted to grace, are GOD's people, exhorting them earnestly to so live that they would shew forth the praises of Divine grace.* The sermon was warm and earnest, full of love and tenderness; and the congregation was very deeply moved by it.

It was a new doctrine to Mabel. She had heard Baptist sermons when a child; but had not heard any but Campbellites preach since she was old enough to form opinions of her own. She observed that during the sermon Herbert was greatly agitated. At the close of the sermon a young lady with the beams of happiness shining out of her countenance came forward to unite with the church. *She related a simple but touching experience: how she was roused to consciousness of*

her lost condition; how she was troubled day and night with a great sorrow; how she struggled with unbelief, fearing JESUS would not save her; and, finally, how she obtained mercy, the sweet assurance of pardon and the peace that passeth understanding. When the pastor had asked her a few questions, and had inquired if the church was satisfied with the evidences she gave of conversion, by a vote of the church she was approved for baptism.

It was all new to Mabel. She trembled to think the young lady had told the truth. She did not have a religion that was obtained in that way, nor that sort of religion. She shuddered at the thought that she was not a Christian. But she quieted her fears and eased her conscience by thinking of the doctrine preached by the learned Dr. Stanly, and by remembering she had done according to parental instruction and example. Of course she was right. And she crushed down her fears.

During the church session Herbert arose, pale and earnest, and told the church how he was exercised about preaching, and how he had resisted these impressions in vain. He wished to know whether the church deemed his impressions sufficient evidence of duty to preach the Gospel. The congregation were nearly all moved to tears. Mabel was deeply affected.

"I have been impressed for six months," said old Brother Brown, "that Brother Herbert would preach the Gospel. GOD be praised."

"Amen!" chimed in several voices.

Herbert was licensed to preach by the church. After some minor matters were attended to the church adjourned.

On Sunday morning a sermon was preached by the pastor on the work of the HOLY SPIRIT.

Mabel's faith in her own salvation was again shaken. She was growing uneasy. She had lost some sleep Saturday night. Just before the benediction was pronounced the pastor announced that Herbert Fields would preach to the people on the next Sunday.

The short distance home after services was completed in silence. All were thoughtful and felt chained to silence by the events of the day.

In the afternoon Herbert took his Bible and sought for a text to preach on the next Sunday. Mabel walked out under the shade trees in the yard and thought and thought. Mrs. Fields sought her closet to offer thanks and prayer for her son. Aunt Juda, one of the busiest bodies about the house, went out to tell Mabel how happy she was that her young master was going to preach. Her eyes were sparkling and her dark visage shone with happiness.

"What is the matter, Aunt Juda?" inquired Mabel.

"Lor' bless you, chile, I'se been so happy these two days that this old body can't hardly hold my joyful soul! I'se prayed many a prar for that boy tew preach and de gude Lord hab heard my prar - blessed be His holy name foreber! I'll never git done blessen de Lord."

"Aunt Juda, do you think GOD answers prayers of that nature?"

"Why, yes, chile, ob course Him do. Are you a Chrischun and habn't larnt yit that de Lord answers prar? Lor' bless you, chile, I neber wants nothin' but what I prays for it; and I allers gits what I ax for, if I keep on long enough."

"I never prayed much, Aunt Juda; I do not know whether I ever obtained a blessing in answer to prayer or not."

"Why, chile, how did you git your sins pardoned? Didn't you ax de Lord to forgib yer sins?"

"No, auntie, my sins were pardoned when I was baptized."

'Well, it's moughty strange; our preachers allers tells sinners to repent and belieb in JESUS tew git the forgibness ob dere sins. I dunno 'bout that doctern, chile; but I'se afeard it won't stand in de judgment. I'se been aprayin' dese forty years; and if dars anything I'se sartain uv it is dis: De Lord will answer prar. But I mus' go, now; I jes' wanted to tell you how this ole soul is a joyin' over Herbert."

After Aunt Juda's return to the house Mabel began to soliloquize thus:

"Everything I hear seems to condemn me; it tells me my religion is a sham, a hollow, empty, worthless thing. Even that old colored soul has proved a spiritual adviser to me. She prays constantly and for everything! Well, I cannot see anything wrong about it, as GOD is the author of all our mercies. I am a pretty Christian! I never prayed fifteen minutes at one time in life. But what a fool I am to let these things trouble me! What if my parents and Dr. Stanly could read my thoughts, - how they'd laugh! And yet I am uneasy, I may be wrong, Dr. Stanly may be wrong, my parents may be wrong. O GOD, show me what I am and whether I am thine, or not. I shall read the Bible and converse freely and make thus an earnest effort to discover where I stand, on the rock or on the sand, whether the matter is surely settled between me and my Lord."

Mabel then returned to the house and spent the remnant of the afternoon in searching the Scriptures. She had made up her mind to have a talk with her aunt and cousin on some subjects, never allowing them to think for one moment, however, that she doubted her personal salvation. So when supper was over and they were gathered in the library, as usual, Mabel inquired:

"What does the word 'justified' mean?"

"It means to declare one to be what he ought to be and to treat him as such; to declare one to be blameless or innocent. The word also means to be *forgiven*, or *pardoned*. The word means to *justify* and justification always includes pardon."

"Mabel," said her aunt, "did you ever feel before you became a Christian like that publican?"

"How is that, aunt?"

"He felt so unworthy," was the response, "that he stood afar off, he did not dare to lift up his eyes unto Heaven, he was so oppressed with a sense of sin, that he smote upon his breast and cried, 'GOD, be merciful to me, a sinner.'"

"No, aunt, I confess I never did. Was your conversion similar to that of the publican?"

"Yes, my dear; my experience agrees very well with that of the publican. The trouble I once had was surely akin to that which pressed him down in the temple like a cart groaning under many sheaves.

"And was your experience, as you call it, similar to that of the publican and that of your mother also, Cousin Herbert?"

"Yes, Cousin Mabel; I thought I had not sinned much, that I was almost good enough to go into the church without pardon; but when I was convicted, it seemed to me I was, if possible, the greatest sinner on earth. I was about two days in this condition, swinging like a pendulum back and forth between hope and despair; and I can point to the time and place when and where I obtained pardon and joy in believing in JESUS."

"Well, you have made that matter plain, if I am capable of discerning the truth; but now I wish to ask if there is such a thing as a sense of forgiveness, or whether we are to determine our acceptance with GOD by our feelings or our baptism."

*"Not by our baptism, Mabel, for the reason that thousands have been baptized who never were at any time accepted of GOD. If we can prove to our satisfaction that we are accepted in the Beloved by our baptism, or by anything else we have done, then the unregenerate, unconverted man and woman in the church can prove the same thing by their baptism. This matter is to be determined by our feelings. **'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God'** (Romans 8:16). **'We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren'** (I John 3:14). Here the sense of our acceptance with GOD is love - love to the brethren. **'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.'** (I John 5:10). Not in what he does or says, not in what is done for him, but in himself. I have ever been persuaded that every real Christian knows what is meant by having the witness in one's self. John also says: **'Hereby we know that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.'** Again, **'Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.'** GOD has given us His Spirit to dwell within us, the Spirit that hates sin and loves holiness; whereas we once had dwelling in us and controlling us the spirit of the devil."*

"Well, aunt, I cannot find any arguments against those plain passages and suppose I must accept them and what they say as correct; but I confess it is all new to me. I never heard these things preached, nor did I ever dream that such doctrines were taught in the Bible. I am afraid, if you are right, I am a stranger to the religion of JESUS; and I am determined not to rest till the matter is settled in some way."

"My dear niece, I am sorry you cannot claim JESUS certainly and fully as your Saviour and shall render you all the aid I can till your mind and conscience are perfectly satisfied. I suspected something was wrong, Mabel, and have been praying for you today."

Mabel was too full of feeling to speak and only by a hard effort kept back the tears so willing to course down her beautiful cheeks, softened now by deep concern.

"Herbert," said his mother, "it is getting late, will you read a lesson from GOD's Word and lead us in prayer?"

This had not been his custom, but he performed the duty with deep emotion. Then they silently retired.

The next few days were noted for their quietude, for all were searching the Scriptures and praying. *By Sunday Mabel was fully satisfied her religion was a mere form without life or power.* Herbert and his mother were acquainted with her mind and had prayed with and for her. They had also endeavored to point out to her the Gospel plan of pardon. Herbert, however, had been so absorbed in his pulpit preparations that he could scarcely think of anything else. He was a long time in his closet that morning; and when he entered the pulpit, pale and earnest, all Thornton was there. Indeed the whole country had come to hear Herbert's first effort. His text was Acts 13:38-39; **"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."**

That the reader may see the manner in which he treated the text, as well as the force of his argument, I give here a brief synopsis of his sermon:

"Paul was here preaching JESUS to the Jews in Antioch, -JESUS the only hope of the world's salvation. There has never been and never can be any Saviour but JESUS. Let us notice:

1. *The finished work of CHRIST is the only ground upon which sins can be remitted.* It is through Him who died as our substitute and rose for our justification that forgiveness of sins is preached; through His pain and blood which is said to wash sin away. By nature the soul is black with corruption and foul with moral pollution; the blood of CHRIST which is the cleansing element is applied through faith by the HOLY SPIRIT; then the soul appears in virgin purity, as white and unspotted as an angel. We must not cling, then, to the law of Moses, to good works, or to any acts of obedience on our part for pardon, or justification from sin; but we must depend on the blood and work of CHRIST.

"2. The *medium* through which GOD's pardoning, justifying grace flows is *faith*. This is plain from the text: '**By Him all that believe are justified.**' If Paul uttered the truth, nothing is more certain than that the man who believes in JESUS is *justified*. This was the doctrine JESUS preached unto Paul when He first met him. He told Paul He had appeared unto him to make him a minister and a witness and to send him to the Gentiles '**that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.**' (Acts 26:18). The forgiveness of sins comes to us then, not through purchase, work or baptism, but through faith.

"3. Notice some results in addition to justification:

"First - *Peace*: '**Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**' (Romans 5:1). The war is *over*, the tomahawk is buried, the sword is thrust into its scabbard, when the sinner believes in JESUS and the peace of GOD fills the heart.

"Second - *Joy*: '**Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.**' (I Peter 1:8). Charles Wesley expresses the joy of new converts when he sings so sweetly.

"Tongue cannot express
The sweet comfort and peace
Of a soul in its earliest love."

"Third - All fear of GOD as an enemy, all fear of death and Hell are removed. While pardoned people have a loving reverential fear of GOD (Psalm 103:11,13,17), they do not have a slavish fear or dread of Him, nor do they thus regard death and judgment. They are conscious of a preparation for what is ahead, for GOD is with them and is their GOD. And now if there are those here who are trembling at the reproof of GOD's Word, I would exhort them to believe in JESUS, to exercise faith in CHRIST. My friends, if you will trust in JESUS, today you will be saved, now you will be pardoned of all sin and be blessed forever."

The sermon was listened to with rapt attention and made a profound impression. The congregation rose and sang:

"I hear Thy welcome voice
That calls me, Lord, to Thee,
For cleansing in Thy precious blood
That flowed on Calvary.

I am coming, Lord,
Coming now to Thee,
Wash me, cleanse me in the blood
That flowed on Calvary."

At the close of the hymn two young men, Herbert's associates, related their experiences, submitted to the church the evidences of conversion and were approved for baptism. An old brother then exhorted others to put their trust in the Saviour. Tearfully, soulfully was then sung:

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O LAMB of GOD, I come, I come."

It was during the singing of the helpful stanzas of this last hymn, that Mabel, who had been struggling with unbelief from the beginning of the discourse, was enabled to fully, sweetly trust in JESUS for pardon. A strange sweet peace filled her soul, while she firmly believed JESUS was not only a Saviour, but her personal Saviour. A radiant light illuminated her countenance as it sprang up from the peace and joy of her heart. Mrs. Fields, who had been watching and praying for Herbert with all the tender solicitude of a mother, had also been watching and praying for Mabel. She observed the peaceful expression on Mabel's face, and, as soon as opportunity was afforded, she said:

"Mabel, my child, a change has come over you, you have found the Saviour."

"Yes, aunt," replied Mabel, "I am the happiest person in Thornton. I believe I have perfect assurance of acceptance with CHRIST; and I think I shall never experience another moment's uneasiness or uncertainty about my future welfare."

She uttered these words just as they were all seated in the carriage for their drive home. They all rejoiced together. There were tears of joy.

"Herbert," continued Mabel, "this is the happiest day of my life. I shall never get through praising the Lord for bringing me on this visit to you. I had no thought but I was as certainly a Christian as anyone; and the probability is I would have lived on at Sterling in that cold formal manner, dreaming I was in the way to Heaven and yet in the way to perdition. I can hardly wait to get home to tell my father and mother of my new found happiness. I think I shall never wish to do anything but serve the Lord."

"Cousin Mabel," replied Herbert, "I know of nothing that could give me more pleasure than to see you thus rejoicing in JESUS as your Saviour. Next to our own salvation, the salvation of our friends gives us joy. I have felt the joy you now feel and am sure I have seen but few days equal to my spiritual birthday in happiness."

"Herbert, I was a profound stranger to the import of many things I read and heard and sang. So many things change their meaning to me now. My conversion is like a sunburst.

'Happy day, happy day,
When JESUS washed my sins away.'

does not mean now what it did before."

"And it alludes, not to baptism, but to cleansing in the blood of JESUS," said Herbert.

Soon after their arrival home, Aunt Juda thrust her head in the door to say:

"I want to know what's all that ere joyin' and laughin' and talkin' about?"

"Aunt Juda, I now have, I hope, the same kind of religion that you have and that you told me about," said Mabel.

"I have learned the language of Zion and can now understand you."

"Lor' bless you, chile, you jes looks as happy as a saint. I'se almost shoutin' to see you so Chrischun-like and glad. It's been forty years sence I wus first pardoned and I reckon I never will furgit how happy I wus. I told you, chile, I wus afeard you wusn't right, fur your doctern wusn't a bit like mine. But it's all right, honey, now, - you'll hab a heap uv trials and triberlations in de narrow way. May de marciful Lord make you a shinin' light in de Kingdom."

Aunt Juda passed into the culinary department and the three continued conversation. During the evening Mabel inquired: "What is the advantage of the Baptist church as a church over the Christian church?"

"It would take a long time to tell, Mabel," said Herbert. "One difference is this: *Baptist churches are like that formed by CHRIST at Jerusalem, which was the first and model church, whereas the Reform has a human founder and is utterly unlike apostolic churches.*"

"Why, Herbert, isn't the Christian church the church of CHRIST?"

"My dear, cousin," Herbert replied, "*to say the least it is very unlike the Jerusalem church. Besides it is certain CHRIST and the apostles founded only one sort of churches. Now, there are a great variety of churches, differing in doctrine and practice, all claiming to be true churches of CHRIST. Primarily, there was only one denomination, now there are many and more coming.*"

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Mabel, "that CHRIST is not the author of the various churches in the land?"

"It would be hard to believe," said Herbert, "that CHRIST is the author of all the confusion on the subject of doctrine and churches; that He would set up one preacher to advocate immersion and another to war against it and do his utmost to get sprinkling substituted for it; that He calls one man to preach infant baptism and another to preach against it."

This subject was pretty thoroughly discussed. Mabel was ready to believe the first statements made by Herbert, because they seemed so reasonable; wishing to be sure she made fight and earnestly contended for every inch of ground yielded. This discussion awakened a new train of thought in Mabel's mind; but she did not mention it, and her cousin and aunt would not, though they saw she was perplexed. Are you eager to know what it is? You shall be told in the next chapter.

~ end of chapter 2 ~
