

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

By

Sydney Watson

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CHAPTER SEVEN

"THE MARK OF THE BEAST"

GEORGE BULLEN was no stranger to Jerusalem, yet it was a strange Jerusalem that met his sight as he entered it by the Jaffa gate. For interest, picturesqueness, even amusement, there is no time so rich as at early morning, at the Jaffa gate.

Bullen had been perfectly familiar, in the old days (eight years ago) with the scene, but there were differences this morning. The long strings of donkeys and camels, laden to within the proverbial "last straw!" and led by foul-smelling, unkempt Bedouins were there, as, usual, in spite of the fact that railways now ran in every direction. Eastern women, robed in their loose blue: cotton wrapper garments-sleeping, as well as day attire - were there in galore, only now all of them walked unveiled, whereas, in the old days, most of them were veiled.

Pilgrims from every land were pouring into the city. The cafes were crowded. The aroma of strong black coffee was often fortunately, stronger than the less pleasant odours of the insanitary streets.

Early as it was, the money changers were doing a stirring trade. Water-carriers moved about with their monotonous cry of "*moyeh*," supplemented, in some cases, by the same word in English – "Water."

Market garden produce, the finest in the world, and now proving how literally Palestine, under the fertilizing power of the "**latter rain**," had become "**a fruitful garden**," was piled everywhere about at the sides of the streets. Cauliflowers thirty-six inches around, with every other vegetable equally fine, melons, lemons, oranges, grapes, tomatoes, asparagus, onions, leeks, lettuce, water-cress, even garlic, all were here, with turbaned dealers sitting cross-legged among the produce.

Early as it was, crowds of American, English, and Continental tourists were abroad, their gleaming white drill attire and tobies and helmets, conspicuous among the grander color of the natives.

But George Bullen had seen all this many times before, his eyes now took but little note of the streets and their contents, except that he noted the fact under the new order of things, since the Jews had come into possession of the city, that there was scarce a Moslem of any kind to be seen, and that most of the tumbledown, smaller houses, of a few years back, had been pulled down, and that the streets in consequence had been considerably widened. Hundreds of new houses of bungalow type, had taken the places of those pulled down. Most of these were built on the "Frazzi" system, or else after the fashion known as reinforced concrete.

All these changes were note-worthy, and full of meaning, but George Bullen's eyes and attention were almost wholly absorbed by the Temple that crowned Mount Moriah. He had not, of course, seen that wonderful painting on Vellum which Rabbi Cohen had shown Ralph Bastin. It is true he had seen photographs and sketches reproduced in the English illustrated papers. But none of these had prepared him for the actual.

Robed in his Syrian garb, and looking for all the world like the "real article," he passed through the cosmopolitan crowd always making his way upwards to where the marble and gold of the wonderful Temple reared itself.

Arrived outside the great main gates, he stood awed at the wonder and magnificence of all that he saw. The whole structure was complete. Not a pole or plank of scaffolding was left standing, no litter or rubbish heaps were to be seen; every approach, every yard of the enclosure was beautifully swept. A few officials, in a remarkable uniform moved here and there about the great enclosure.

For two hours George Bullen moved slowly round the Temple, making long pauses at intervals, and taking in every item of the wondrous architecture and still more wondrous ornamentation. When he finally left the Mount, and took his way down the wide, steep decline - the whole of this wide road was composed of marble blocks, reminding him of the Roman Appian way - his mind was in a whirl, his head ached with the glare of the sun on the gold, and with the deep concentration of his sight upon so much color and glitter. Again and again he paused, and looked upwards and backwards, he had a difficulty in tearing himself away. But he had much to do, and could not afford to linger.

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It was the day before the official opening of the Temple. Jerusalem was thronged - inside and outside, for Jerusalem, (according to Zechariah 2:4) was "**inhabited as a town without walls.**" The environs, and the suburbs had spread in every direction.

For the first time in the history of the world, the hills, Gareb and Goath, outside Jerusalem, had, a few years before this, been covered with villas, bungalows, hotels, etc., absolutely fulfilling Jeremiah 31:38-40.

Lucien Apleon's Palace, which had been built concurrently with the Temple, and which, in its way, was almost as gorgeous a building, was filled with the ten Kings of the Confederacy, and their suites.

Soldiers of every one of the ten nationalities - though all wearing one uniform, save that the "facings" were different to denote the land to which they belonged - were everywhere to be seen. Itinerant vendors moved about among the throngs bawling their chief ware - "Programs for the Temple, to-morrow." George Bullen bought one of the Programs.

It was an amazing production, and as blasphemous as it was amazing. It was most sumptuously got up, printed in a style unknown to the days of even the end of the first decade of the 20th century.

But before he began to read the order of the events, or even to note the marks of sumptuousness of the appearance of the program, his attention was arrested by a bold, curious hieroglyphic which headed the program. This figuring was in richest purple and gold:

For a long time he puzzled over the sign. Then, suddenly a memory returned to him. One night when Ralph Bastin had been speaking to him about the Antichrist he had said:

"Here is a curious thing, George! I have just read in the Revelation, thirteen, eighteen, that The Number of the Beast - the Antichrist - is THE Number of MAN; and his number is 666." Now this number, in the Greek, is made up of two characters which stand for the name of CHRIST, with a third character, the figure of a crooked serpent put between them - the name of GOD's CHRIST, the Messiah, turned into a devil sacrament (i.e. oath of fidelity).

"Ralph would have shown me the sign, I know," Bullen mused, "but that at the very moment we were talking together, there came that scare of fire in the stereo room, and we both rushed away. But now I know that this sign on the program is the 'Mark of the Beast,' and that it signifies the oath of Fidelity to Antichrist."

He caught his breath sharply, as he murmured:

"So it has begun! He has begun to show his hand!"

Then he let his eyes take in the contents of the program.

Beneath the Hieroglyphic was the greeting:

**"TO ALL THE WORLD!
APLEON, EMPEROR,
by the election of
MAN**

Commands the following events in connection
with the Dedication and
opening of the Temple at Jerusalem.

4-30 p. m. 9th Sept., year 1 of Apleon.
(Subject to minor alterations).

Appointment of the High Priest elect,
by the Emperor.
Address by The High Priest.
Confirmation of the 7 years Covenant
between the Hebrew Nation and the Emperor.
Affirmatory Signatures and Seals affixed.
Sign of the Sacrament
to be distributed and donned by all present.

6-30 p. m. Bureaus will be opened all over the city, and in the immediate neighborhood of the Temple for the free distribution of the sacramental signs, with directions for wearing the same. The donning of the sign will be, of course, entirely voluntary.

"For how long," murmured Bullen to himself, "will this be voluntary?"

He continued his reading:

"At 7:30 a. m. 10th Sept. The Dedication of the Temple. The procession of Kings, headed by Apleon, Emperor of the World, will start from the Apleon Palace at 7:00 a. m. Imperial troops will line the way.

"Fanfare of trumpets will greet the procession on its arrival at the Temple Gates.

"Opening ode will be sung by 1,000, singers massed in the courtyard.

"Ceremony inside will commence by the investiture of the High Priest with his glorious robes of office, the investiture will be performed by the Emperor.

"The 7 years Covenant to be read aloud by the High Priest.

"Ode of Adoration of the Emperor to be sung by the Priests, choristers, and others.

"The ceremony is to be held at the above early hour, that there may be no undue exposure to the heat of the later fore-noon.

In pursuance with the liberty of these more enlightened days, all persons may worship with covered or uncovered heads, as may seem fit to each person. This applies to Jews and Jewesses also, and, there will be no division of sex for the Jew and Jewess, they will worship together. The days of the *grille* are past.

"LONG LIVE THE EMPEROR!"

"Of all the extraordinary productions-!" murmured George Bullen. He did not finish his sentence, he would have been puzzled to have found terms to have expressed all that he felt.

"I wonder if these programs can be procured in London?" he went on.

A seller passed him at that moment, and he bought a second program, to send to Ralph Bastin. They had made an arrangement, before parting, that everything - letters, wireless, and all other messages - should be sent in code, and to an address, and under a name that should not be recognized as having any connection with the '*Courier*' - "if," Ralph had added quietly, "there are no demons present here who can divulge our talk."

This was always one of the difficulties that the godly, at that time, had to contend with, the ignorance of how far invisible demons could spy upon, and report their sayings and doings.

Hour by hour, the streets grew denser, for each hour brought new arrivals, and always some of the elite of the earth. To George Bullen, with the journalist instinct, there was "copy" everywhere, and he was not slow to take full notes.

Things were quieter from one to four, for the heat, in the open, was almost unbearable. At four o'clock, Bullen was close by the chief gate of the Temple. He would watch the arrival of the chief actors in the first part of the great ceremonies.

Through the mighty hosts of acclaiming peoples which lined that wide marble upward road, King after King rode, all on white horses. Merchant princes from Babylon; Royal princes from many lands.

The last of the Kings to arrive was the King of Syria. At the gate, close to where George Bullen was standing, the horse of the Syrian monarch grew restive.

Quick to seize an opportunity of getting into the Temple to see the ceremony, George caught the rein of the horse, and with a soothing word and touch, led the beast through the gate, flinging back a word in Syrian to the King in the saddle.

Hearing his own tongue, and noting the garb of his horse's leader, the King flung a word of thanks to George, who led the horse right up to the door of the sanctuary.

Each monarch kept his saddle. Five were drawn up on one side, and five on the other. They waited for Apleon. A moment or two only, then amid a thunder of acclaim of "Long live the World's Emperor!" Lucien Apleon, the Antichrist, the Man of Sin, riding a jet black horse, cantered through the gate.

He was a marvellous figure of a man. In stature he was nearer seven feet than six. His form as erect as a Venetian mast. His costume was strange, but very striking, and gave him a regality of appearance.

It was partly Oriental, partly occidental, and consisted of a curious-toned darkish green military tunic, heavily-frogged with gold, and with a wide, gold-braid collar. The buttons of the tunic were separate emeralds set in circles of diamonds, and enclosed in a wide circlet of gold. He wore white knee-breeches, and high Hessian boots, adorned at the heels with gold spurs.

Over his shoulders, clasped at the neck with a large gold-and-precious-stone buckle of the same mysterious form as the hieroglyphic crest at the head of the Programs, he wore a wonderful burnouse of white and gold fleece, the gold predominating over the white, and flashing fiercely, gorgeously in the sun. His leonine head was surmounted with a dazzling covering that was neither a crown, a mitre, nor a turban, but partook of the nature of all three. It was profusely bedecked with the most costly of precious stones. The largest diamond ever seen, shaped as an eight-pointed star, and measuring nearly six inches from point to point, was set in the front-center of the mitre-turban-crown. With the sun shining upon it, it was impossible to gaze upon the diamond.

Riding up to the door of the porch of the Temple, his horse's fore-hoofs resting on the upper of the four steps, he paused only to return the salutes of the ten kings, then flung himself from the saddle, and waited a moment until his horse was led away. Then turning outwards towards the way by which he had come, he surveyed the scene below him.

Never in the history of the world had anything more wonderful been seen. Several million people were gathered - streets were blocked; walls of the city, roofs of the houses and palaces and public buildings were packed. Every window that faced the mount was crowded. Flags flew everywhere within the city, and beyond the walls, where hundreds of thousands of acclaiming people were gathered, every eye was directed towards that Temple entrance where Antichrist, the World's Emperor stood.

As he turned to face the millions of acclaiming people, a gun was fired from the grounds of his palace, and at the same instant, a ball of white, which had hung at the head of the flag-staff on the roof of his palace, suddenly broke, and there swept out upon the light breeze, an enormous white silk flag, the center of which bore the mystic inscription that had already appeared on the official programs, and which he wore in gold jewels for a buckle of his burnouse.

The eyes of Apleon flashed with a curious pride as he saw the great white flag break in the air, while a smile, diabolical as Hell itself, curled his lips. It seemed almost as though it was to see that damnable challenge flung forth to the wind, that he had turned, more than to acknowledge the acclaim of the gathered millions of the deceived, lie-deluded people.

A moment later, he turned into the Temple. The ten kings, Babylonian merchant-princes, and others of note following.

George Bullen, walking directly behind the King of Syria, passed in with the others.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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