IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

Sydney Watson
(Author of *Mark of the Beast)*

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage Ministry of a century ago

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

CHAPTER SIX

AN INTERESTING TALK

"*The Courier*" was now an established fact. As a newspaper it was as much a revelation to the journalists as to the general public. London had taken to it from the first moment of its issue. The provinces, instead of following their usual course of waiting to see what London did, took their own initiative, and adopted the new paper at once. Every instinct about the ideal paper, felt and nursed during the waiting years by Tom Hammond, had been true instinct. He had always felt them to be true; now he realized the fact. He was a proud man, a happy man.

One curious feature of the new journal had attracted much attention, even before the publication of the first issue. In his "Foreword," as he had termed it, in a full page announcement that appeared in three of the leading London dailies, Tom Hammond had said:

"An important feature of the '*Courier*' will be the item or items (as the case may be) which will be found each day under the heading, 'From the Prophet's Chamber.' A greater man than the editor of '*The Courier*' once said, 'Every editor of a newspaper ought to have a strain of the seer in his composition. He ought to have the gift of prophecy up to a certain point. He ought to be so thoroughly conversant with the history of his own and every other nation that when history is on the point of repeating itself - as it has a habit of doing - he may not be caught altogether napping.' It is the unexpected that happens, we say.

“True, but there are many of the so-called happenings of the unexpected that to the spirit of the seer will have been expected and more than half-prophesied. Now, while we propose that the whole tone of '*The Courier*' shall show the spirit of the seer in a measure, we shall endeavor to make the particular column to which we are now alluding essentially new.

“In it we shall deal with every class of subject likely to prove mentally arrestive to our readers, and shall make it prophetic up to the limits of our capacities as man, citizen and editor. How far the possession of the quality of the seer will be found in us we must leave the future - and our readers - to decide. But we certainly anticipate that 'The Prophet's Chamber' column will be one of the most popular features of what we shall aim to make the most popular paper of the day."

Tom Hammond was no believer in luck. He had left nothing to chance in the production of his paper. There was not a department left to subordinates which he did not personally assure himself was being carried out on the best, the safest, lines. For weeks he literally lived on the spot where his great paper was to be produced, taking his meals and sleeping at a hotel close by the huge building that housed "*The Courier*."

He saw very little of Sir Archibald Carlyon during these weeks, and nothing at all of George, or the fair American, Madge Finisterre. George was in Scotland; Madge on the Continent. His thoughts often turned to the American girl, and his eye brightened and his pulse quickened whenever he heard of her from Sir Archibald. Once he had been permitted by Sir Archibald to read a gossipy letter sent by her to the old baronet. He laughed over a quotation in that letter.

"I am not like the Chicago girl," she wrote, "of whom our Will Carleton writes, who, telling all about her tour in 'Urop,' says,

"Old Scotland? Yes, all in our power,
We did there to be through;
We stopped in Glasgow one whole hour,
Then straight to 'Edinborough.'
At Abbotsford we made a stay
Of half-an-hour precisely.
(The ruins all along the way
Were ruined very nicely).

"We 'did' a mountain in the rain,
And left the others undone,
Then took the 'Flying Scotchman' train,
And came by night to London.
Long tunnels somewhere on the line
Made sound and darkness deeper;
No; English scenery is not fine
Viewed from a Pullman sleeper.

"Oh, Paris! Paris! Paris! 'Tis
No wonder, dear, that you go
So far into ecstasies
About that Victor Hugo!
He paints the city, high and low,
With faithful pen and ready.
(I think, my dear, I ought to know,
We drove there two hours steady.")

"I feel," Madge had written, "that one wants a lifetime to 'do' the Continent."

Tom Hammond's thoughts often flew to the gay girl. This morning, having seen a review of Carleton's latest book of ballads, he had been reminded of her, and he laid down his pen a moment, as he gave himself up to a little reverie about her. An announcement aroused him.

"Miss Finisterre and Mr. Carlyon, sir."

He smiled to himself. "Talk of angels, etc.," he mused. The next moment he was greeting his callers. Madge Finisterre looked in Tom Hammond's eyes, more radiant now than ever.

"Fancy, Mr. Hammond," she laughed, when the greetings were over, "George and I met at Dover! He had come south to see a friend off from Dover, and was on the pier when I landed from the Calais boat. We've been down to that dear old country house, but I wanted to do some shopping, and to see how you looked as editor-in-chief and general boss of the biggest daily paper in the world."

Tom Hammond's eyes flashed with a pleased light at her confession, which implied that she had thought of him, even as he had thought of her. He noted, too, how an extra shade of color warmed the clear skin of her cheeks as she made her confession.

"Because," she went on, "all the world declares that '*The Courier*' is the premier paper of the world, and everyone who is anyone - in the know of things, I mean - knows that Mr. Tom Hammond is '*The Courier*.' ”

The talk, for a few minutes, was "shop."

"You don't go in for a column of comic," Madge presently said. "If you did, I could give you an item, we, George and I, heard in the train as we ran up to town. There were two of your English parsons in our carriage, talking in that high-faluting note that always reminds me of your high-pitched church service,- 'dearly-beloved-brethren' note.

"Well, the two parsons were telling yarns one against the other - chestnuts were cheap, I assure you,- and one of them told a story he tacked on to General Booth - the last time I heard it, it was told of Spurgeon. He said that the General was going down Whitechapel, and, seeing the people pouring into a show, and wondering what there was so powerfully attractive to the masses in these shows, he determined to go into this particular one. It was advertised as a 'Museum of Biblical Curiosities.' Just as he got in, the showman was exhibiting a very rusty old sword, and saying,

"'Now, yere's a werry hinterestin' hobject. This is the sword wot Balaam 'it 'is hass wiv, 'cos 'ee wouldn't go.' Booth speaks up, and says,

“ ‘Hold hard there, my friend; you're getting a little mixed. Balaam hadn't got a sword. He said, "Would that I had a sword." ’

“ ’That's all right, guv'nor,' cried the showman; 'this is the sword 'ee wished 'ee 'ad.’ ”

The girl's mimicry of the coster-showman's speech was inimitable, and the two men laughed as much at her telling as at the tale itself.

George Carlyon got up from his seat, saying, "But I say, you two, do you mind if I leave you to amuse each other for an hour? I want, very much, to run down to the club. I'll come back for you, Madge, or meet you somewhere."

"Bless the boy!” she laughed. "Do you think I was reared in an incubator, or in your Mayfair? Haven't you learned that, given a Yankee girl's got dollars under her boots to wheel on, it ain't much fuss for her to skate through this old country of yours, nor yet through Europe, come to that, even though she has no more languages under her tongue than good plain Duchess county American. I told the 'boys' that before I left home."

George Carlyon laughed, as, accepting his release, he nodded to the pair and left the room.
It was a strangely new experience to Tom Hammond, to be left alone with a beautiful and charming woman like Madge Finisterre.

The picture she made, as she moved round the room looking at the framed paintings, all gifts from his artist friends, came to him as a kind of revelation. When he had met her that day in the Embankment hotel, he had been charmed with her beauty and her frank, open, unconventionality of manner. He had thought of her many times since - only that very day, a moment before her arrival,- thought of her as men think of a picture or a poem which has given them delight. But now he found her appealing to him.

She was a woman, a beautiful, attractive woman. She suggested sudden thoughts of how a woman, loved, and returning that love, might affect his life, his happiness.

Her physical grace and beauty, the exquisite fit of her costume, the perfect harmony of it - all this struck him now. But the woman in her appealed strongest to him.

"Awfully good, this sketch of street Arabs!" she turned to say, as she stood before a clever bit of black-and-white drawing.

An end of a lace scarf she was wearing caught in a nail in the wall. He sprang forward to release the scarf. It was not readily done, for his fingers became infected with a strange nervousness. Once their hands met, their fingers almost interlocked. A curious little thrill went through him. He lifted his eyes involuntarily, and met her glance. A warm color shot swiftly into her face. And he was conscious at the same moment that his own cheeks burned. "I guess I'll sit down before I do any more mischief," she laughed. Woman-like, she was quicker to get at ease than he was.

"Do you know, Mr. Hammond," she went on, as she seated herself in a revolving armchair, "I just wanted very much to see how you were fixed up here, and how you looked now that you are a big man."

He made a deprecatory little gesture.

"Oh, but you are a really great man," she went on.

"I have heard some big people talk of you, and say -"

She leaned back, and smiled merrily at him, as she went on, "Well, I guess if there's only a shadow of truth in the old saying, then your ears must often have burned."

Madge Finisterre gave the chair in which she was sitting a half twist.

"Why don't you British people go in for rockers?" she asked. "I simply can't enjoy your English homes to the full, for want of a good rocker, wherever I go."

An india-rubber bulb lay close to his hand. He pressed it without her noting the movement. A clerk suddenly appeared. Hammond looked across at Madge, with an "Excuse me, Miss Finisterre, one moment."

He drew a sheet of notepaper towards him. The paper was headed with "*The Courier*" title and address.

"Send me, at once, unpacked and ready for immediate use, the best American drawing-room rocking-chair you have in stock. Send invoice, cash will follow," etc.

That was what he wrote. He enclosed it in an envelope, then on a separate slip of paper he wrote:"Take a cab, there and back, to Wallis's, Holborn Circus. See how smart you can be; bring the chair, ordered, back with you."

From his purse he took a four-shilling piece, and gave the young fellow the note, the slip of instructions, and the coin.

As the attendant left the room, he turned again to Madge, who, utterly unsuspicious of the errand on which he had sent his employee, was amusing herself with a copy of "Punch." She looked up from the paper as the door closed.

"I like '*The Courier*' immensely, Mr. Hammond," she cried. There was a rare warmth of admiration in her tone.

"Thank you, Miss Finisterre!” His eyes said more than his words, "what do you specially like in it?" he asked; "or is your liking of a more general character?"

"I do like it from a general standpoint," she replied; "I think it the best paper in the world. But especially do I like your own particular column, 'From a Prophet's Chamber.' But, Mr. Hammond, about the Jew - you are going in strong for him, aren't you?"

"From the ordinary newspaper point, yes," he said.

"I cannot quite recall how my mind was first switched on to the subject, but I do know this - that the more I study the past history of the race, and the future predictions concerning it, the more amazed I am, how, past, present, and future, the Jews, as a nation are interwoven with everything political, musical, artistic - everything, in fact. And I wonder, equally, that we journalists, as a whole - I speak, of course, as far as I know my kinsmen in letters - should have thought and written so little about them.

"Take their ubiquitousness, Miss Finisterre," went on Hammond. "There does not appear to have been an empire in the past that has not had its colony of Jews. By which I do not mean a Ghetto, simply, a herding of sordid-living, illiterate Hebrews, but a study colony of men and women, who, by sheer force of intellect, of brain power, have obtained and maintained the highest positions, the greatest influence.

"Why, in China, even, isolated, conservative China, before CHRIST was born in Bethlehem, the Jews were a prosperous, ubiquitous people, worshipping the one GOD, The Lord, amidst all the foulness of Chinese idolatries."

Madge Finisterre listened with rapt interest. The man before her, fired with his subject, talked marvellously. A good listener helps to make a good talker, and Tom Hammond talked well.

"It is not simply that they practically hold the wealth of the world in their hands, that they are the world's bankers, but they are dominating our press, our politics."

With glowing picture of words he poured out a flood of wondrous fact and illustration, winding up presently with:

"Then you cannot kill the Jew, you cannot wipe him out. Persecution has had the effect of stunting his growth, so that the average Britisher is several inches taller than the average Jew. But the life of the Hebrew is indestructible. Sometimes of late I have asked myself this question, as I have reviewed the history of the dealings of so-called Christianity with the Semitic race - Has Christianity been afraid of the Jews, or why has she sought to stamp them out?"

The pair had been so engrossed with their talk that they had lost all count of time. A half-hour had slipped by since Tom Hammond had sent his messenger to Wallis's. The young fellow suddenly appeared at the door.

"Got it, Charlie?"

Without waiting for a reply to his question, the editor bounded from his seat and passed outside. Thirty seconds later the door opened again, and he appeared, bearing a splendid rocker in his arms. Before she fully realized the wonder of the whole thing, Madge found herself seated in the rocking-chair. Swaying backwards and forwards, and blushing and smiling, she cried:

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Hammond!”

"You said you could never fully enjoy our English houses for want of a rocker. Now, however 'angelic' your visits to this room may be, you shall have one inducement to slip in - a rocker."

She was beginning her thanks again, when he interrupted with:

"But, excuse me, Miss Finisterre, what about some tea? Shall we go out and get some, or would you prefer that I should order it in here?"

"Oh, here, by all means! I can have tea at a restaurant every day of my life, but with a real London lion - a real live editor - and in his own special den. Why, it may never fall to my lot again. Oh, here, by all means!" she cried, excitedly.

He squeezed that rubber bulb again. To the lad Charlie, who appeared, he gave a written order to a neighboring restaurant. Twenty minutes later the tea was in the room.

Madge officiated with the teapot. Hammond watched her every movement. A truly pretty, graceful girl never looks handsomer to a man than when presiding at a tea table. Tom Hammond thought Madge had never looked more charming. The meal was a very enjoyable one, and as she poured out his second cup he paid her a pretty compliment, adding:

"To see you thus, Miss Finisterre, makes one think what fools men are not to -" He paused abruptly. She flashed a quick glance of enquiry at him.

"Not to what, Mr. Hammond?"

"I wonder," he replied, "if I ought to say what I left unsaid?"

"Why not?" she asked.

"I don't know why I should not," he laughed. "I was going to say that, to have a bright, beautiful, graceful woman like Madge Finisterre pouring out tea for him, makes a man think what a fool he is not to marry."

His tone and glance were alike full of meaning. She could not mistake him. Her color heightened visibly. Her eyes drooped before his ardent gaze. The situation became tense and full of portent. The opening of the door at that instant changed everything. George Carlyon had returned. At the same moment a wire was brought to Hammond, together with a sheaf of letters - the afternoon mail.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

***