

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

By

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CHAPTER ONE

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

THE huge London church was crowded in every part, and men had been standing in the aisles from the first moment that the service began. The preacher who had attracted so huge a crowd at two-thirty on a weekday afternoon, was one of the very youngest of the "coming men" of the English church. Tall, thin, with a magnificent head crowned by a mane of hair that was fast becoming prematurely grey, and a face so intense in its cast, and set with eyes so piercing, that strangers, not knowing who he was, would almost inevitably turn to look at him when they passed him on the street. His career had been a strange one. Ordained at quite an early age, he had been offered a living within six months of his ordination. He entered upon his charge, preached but once only, then met with an accident that laid him low for seven years. The seven years were fruitful years, since, shut up with GOD and His word, he had become almost the most remarkable spiritually-minded Bible student of his time.

The day came, at length, when once more he was strong enough to do public service, and though without a living, from the moment that he had preached his first sermon, after his recovery, he found himself in constant request on every hand. He lived in close communion with GOD, and his soul burned within him as he delivered - not an address, not a sermon, but the *message of GOD*.

The music of the voluntary was filling all the church, while the offering was being taken. Then, as the last well-filled plate was piled on the step of the communion rail, the voluntary died away in a soft whisper. Amid a tense hush, he rose to give out the hymn before the sermon. Clear, bell-like, his voice rang out:

"When I survey the wondrous cross."

The hymn sung, he gave out his text: **"Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil."**

He paused for one moment, and his eagle eyes swept the sea of faces. Then in quiet, calm, but incisive tones he asked:

"Who, - what, was Judas Iscariot? Was he *human*, was he man, as I am, as you are? or, was he a *demon*? JESUS CHRIST our Lord, who knew as GOD, as well as man, declared that Judas was a demon - a fallen angel.

The silence was awesome in its tenseness. Every eye was fixed on the preacher, necks were strained forward, lips were parted - the people held their breath.

Again that clear, rich bell-like voice rang out in the repeated question: "Who, I repeat, was Judas Iscariot? Was he a man, in the usual acceptance of the term, or was he a demon incarnated? What does the Bible say about him? In considering this I ask you each to put from your mind, as far as it is possible for you to do so, all preconceived ideas, all that you have been accustomed to think about this flame of evil in the story of CHRIST.

"And first let me say what my own feeling, my own strong personal conviction is regarding Judas Iscariot. I believe him to have been a demon incarnated by the power of the Devil, whose intent was to frustrate GOD's plans. In all his foul work of destruction and confusion, the Devil, from the time of the Fall in Eden, has ever been busy counterfeiting all that GOD has wrought out for the salvation of the human race, and as the time approaches for his own utter defeat so the more cunning will his devices of evil become.

"In the foulness of his thoughts to frustrate GOD's purposes of salvation, I believe that when he knew that CHRIST had been born, that GOD had Himself become incarnate, so that He might deliver man - for we must never forget that **'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself'** - that he, the Devil, incarnated one of his demons, who afterwards became known as Judas Iscariot, the Betrayer of CHRIST."

For one instant the preacher paused, for the awed and listening mass of people who had been literally holding their breath, were compelled to inbreathe, and the catch of breath was heard through all the place.

"To use a twentieth century expression," he went on, "I may seem to have 'given myself away' by this statement of my own conviction. But I am not concerned with the effect, I am concerned only with a great and important truth, as it seems to me, and a truth which will, I believe, be curiously, fatefully emphasized in the days near to come, when our Lord shall have taken away His church at His coming in the air.

"Now let me invite your attention to the actual Scriptures which speak of Judas Iscariot. But before doing so let me acknowledge my indebtedness for the inceptive thought of all I have said, and shall say, to Dr. Joseph A. Seiss, of Philadelphia, in his wondrous lectures on '*The Revelation*.'"

"We will turn first again to my text, to the 6th of John, the 70th verse, **'Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil'** - a demon! He spake of Judas Iscariot.

“The second text I want us to note is in John 17, verse 12, and again it is JESUS who makes the solemn declaration: **'Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.'** The third text I would draw your attention to is in the 25th verse of Acts 1. It is Peter who is speaking, at the time of the choosing of another as apostle in Judas's place; he says: **'Judas, by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.'** “

In spite of their intentness in the wondrous personality of the messenger, and the extraordinary character of his message, not a few found time to marvel at the facile ease and certainty of touch with which he handled his little pocket Bible, and turned to the desired places. As he finished reading the third passage, and laid the open book down upon the desk, the old hush deepened upon the people.

"Link those three passages together;" he went on, "and you will instantly see what I meant when I said just now, that I believe Judas Iscariot to have been an incarnated demon, and incarnated by the Devil for the one fell purpose of frustrating GOD's designs for the World's Salvation through JESUS CHRIST.

"There is not a single recorded good thought, word, or deed that ever Judas thought, said, or did. And do please remember that CHRIST was never once deceived by him, for in the 64th verse of that 6th of John, we read **'For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him.'** And knowing everything, he said of the Betrayer, **'I have chosen'** - he is a demon. If our Lord had said 'one of you has a demon,' the whole statement would have been different, for many, in CHRIST's days, we find, were possessed by demons, and He, by His divine power cast out the demons. But in Judas we have something different, not a human man in whom a demon has taken up his abode, but a demon who has had a body given him in which to pass among men as a man.

"CHRIST's statement that he was a **'Son of Perdition,'** is equally damning as to the real nature of Judas Iscariot. He is called the **'son of Simon,'** as regards the human side of his life, as JESUS was called **'Joseph's son,'** - more especially *Mary's son*.

"But, though, nominally, 'Simon's son,' Judas Iscariot was ever **'a Son of Perdition.'** And because he was this - 'a demon,' a Son of Perdition, Peter, at Pentecost time, speaking in the Holy Ghost, was able to say that he, Judas, **'went to his own place.'** We need spend no time in any detailed arguments as to whether this **'place'** to which he went in the under-world was Tartarus or elsewhere, it was **'his own Place,'** *the place of imprisoned demons*, the place where other demons **'who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation are reserved in chains.'** Neither Tartarus or Hell were ever 'prepared' for lost human souls, 'but for demons, and, as a demon, Judas went to his own place.' ”

He paused a moment. His tall, thin form became rigid in the intensity of his service. In the silence, that deepened, the ticking of the clock in the front of the gallery could be heard plainly in every part of the building.

Slowly he bent his lithe form forward until he leaned far over the Reading Desk. Then stretching out his arm, the long index finger pointing forward, he said:-

"Listen, friends! Receive this next part of the message, if you will, if you can. I believe that **'The Man of Sin,' 'The Antichrist,'** when he shall be revealed, will be Judas re-incarnated.

"There can be no doubt, I think, but that anyone studying Daniel's description of the Antichrist will realize that, in his *human* personation, he will necessarily be a Jew, for otherwise, the Jews (who will have largely returned to their own land, and will have built their Temple, and resumed their Mosaic service), would not accept him as their leader, and make their seven years' covenant with him.

"Now, beloved, my last word is a very solemn one. It is this, our Lord's Return for His Bride, the Church, is very near, - **'even at the doors.'** Any day, any hour he may return. We, here, may never reach the point of the 'Benediction' at the arranged close of this service, for JESUS may come and call up to Himself everyone of His own in this place. Then what of you here who are not His? For you, there will remain nothing but the horrors of the Tribulation, (should you seek and find GOD after the Translation of the church).

"Will you be among the Martyrs of the Tribulation, or of the final impenitent, rebels who shall be cast into the Hell reserved for the Devil, for Antichrist, for the demons; or, blessed thought, will you here and now yield to CHRIST, and become the saved of the Lord?"

Amid the most intense hush, he added: "Somewhere, even as I have preached of him, and as you have listened, there is, I believe, a young man, of noble stature, exceedingly attractive, wealthy, fascinating, - bewitching, in fact, since all the world will wonder after him - yes, somewhere in the world, perhaps in this very city where we are now gathered, is the young man who, presently, when our Lord has come, when the Church, and the Holy Spirit are gone, will manifest himself as the Antichrist. May GOD save everyone of us from his reign. for JESUS CHRIST's sake, Amen!"

A gasping cry of amazed wonder broke from the thousand or more throats. They bowed, as one man, under the silent request of his spread hands, they heard the old, old "Benediction" as they had never heard it before: "May the Grace of our Lord Jesus CHRIST, the Love of GOD, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, all unite in leading us into the Peace of GOD which passeth all understanding, Amen."

Silent, awed, in many cases speechless, the great congregation passed out of the several exits of the church. Among them was the woman we know as Judith Montmarte, and her son.

In spite of their pre-occupation, many of the outgoing congregation turned to gaze with wondering eyes upon the handsome young fellow who walked with such a regal air beside his mother, Judith Montmarte. Like Saul, in Israel, he stood a head and shoulders above the tallest of the crowd. And he was magnificently proportioned.

On the continent, and in New York and Chicago, Lucien Apleon, was well-known, but only in certain of the *English* circles was he known. Those who knew him, whether men or women, fairly idolized him, in spite of the impenetrable mystery that enveloped his birth.

For a full year Judith Montmartre had disappeared from the ken of the world. Where she went, what she did, what happened to her, none ever knew.

On her re-appearance in her Hungarian home, she called herself Madame Apleon, and her child was Lucien Apleon. No one ever heard of a husband, no one knew the history of that year of disappearance.

Lucien Apleon was now about twenty-five years of age, but with the maturity of face and character of a much older man. He was accounted, by all who knew him, to be the most accomplished man in everything, that the world had ever known. The greatest scientists were babes before him. As artist, sculptor, poet, musician, he could not be approached by any living being. And there appeared an almost creative power in all he did, since works of every kind of art grew under his hand.

Among those who had been in that service, and who turned to look at Lucien Apleon, was Ralph Bastin. It was his last day in London, previous to those years of wandering recorded in "*The Twinkling of an Eye*."

Often during those years of adventurous wanderings the memory of Ralph Bastin had recalled that wonderful service. One special moment of its recall was during that fateful, sacrificial cave scene in that Caribbean Island.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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