

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

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(Author of *Mark of the Beast*)

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MAJOR H - ON "THE COMING!"

TOM HAMMOND was riding westwards in the Tube. It was the morning after the events narrated in the last chapter. He had just bought from a book-stall a volume of extracts from essays on art in all its branches. He sat back in the comfortable seat of the car dipping into the book. Suddenly an extract arrested his attention.

It was evidently a description of the Crucifixion, but - most tantalizing - the head of this page was torn, he could find out nothing about the authorship. But the extract interested him:-

"Darkness - sooty, portentous darkness - shrouds the whole scene; only above the accursed wood, as if through a horrid rift in the murky ceiling, a rainy deluge - 'sleety-flaw, discolored water' - streams down amain, spreading a grisly, spectral light, even more horrible than that palpable night. Already the Earth pants thick and fast! The darkened Cross trembles! The winds are dropt - the air is stagnant - a muttering rumble growls underneath their feet, and some of the miserable crowd begin to fly down the hill. The horses sniff the coming terror, and become unmanageable through fear. The moment rapidly approaches, when, nearly torn asunder by His own weight, fainting with loss of blood, which now runs in narrower rivulets from His slit veins, His temples and breast drowned in sweat, and His black tongue parched with the fiery death-fever, JESUS cried, **I thirst.**' The vinegar is elevated to Him.

"His head sinks, and the sacred corpse 'swings senseless on the cross.' A sheet of vermilion flame shoots sheer through the air and vanishes; the rocks of Carmel and Lebanon cleave asunder; the sea rolls on high from the sands its black, weltering waves. Earth yawns, and the graves give up their dwellers. The dead and the living are mingled together in unnatural conjunction, and hurry through the Holy City.

"New prodigies await them there. The veil of the Temple - the unpierceable veil - is rent asunder from top to bottom, and that dreaded recess, containing the Hebrew mysteries - the fatal ark, with the tables and seven-branched candelabrum - is disclosed by the light of unearthly flames to the God-deserted multitude."

"Strange!" he mused, as his eyes stared into space, his mind occupied with the thought of the extract. "Strange how everything of late seems to be compelling my attention to the CHRIST - CHRIST past, CHRIST future."

At that instant he heard someone mention the name of his paper. He glanced in the direction of the voices. Two gentlemen were talking together. It was evident that his own identity was utterly unknown to them.

"You're right, you're right," the second man was saying. "A very clever fellow, evidently, that editor of *The Courier*."

"You have noticed, of course," the first man went on, "those striking paragraphs, of late, about the Jews. Though, to a keen student of the subject, they show a very superficial knowledge; still, it is refreshing to find a modern newspaper editor writing like that at all."

"Yes," the other said, "but it is strange how few people, even Christian people, ever realize how intimately the future of the Jewish race is bound up with that other shamefully neglected truth - the coming of the Lord for His Church. I wish the editor of *The Courier*, and every other newspaper editor, could be induced to go this afternoon and hear Major H - speak on these things at the -- Room."

"British Museum!" called the conductor of the car.

The two talkers got out. Tom Hammond also alighted. As he mounted in the lift to the street, he decided that he would hear this major on the subject that was occupying his own perplexed thought so much.

Three o'clock that afternoon found him one of a congregation of three to four hundred persons in the Room.

He was amazed at the quality of the audience. He recognized quite a dozen well-known London clergymen and ministers, with a score of other equally well-known laymen - literary men, merchants, etc. All were of a superior class. There was a large sprinkling of ladies, who, in many cases, were evidently sisters. Unaccustomed to such meetings, Tom Hammond did not know how enormous is the number of Christian women who are to be found at special religious gatherings, conventions, etc.

There was a subdued hum of whispering voices in the place. The hum suddenly ceased. Tom Hammond glanced quickly towards the platform. Half-a-dozen gentlemen and one or two ladies were taking their seats there. They bowed their heads in silent prayer.

A minute later a tall, fine looking man, the center one of the platform group, rose to his feet and advanced to the rail. He held a hymn-book in his hand. His keen eyes swept the faces of the gathered people. Then on a clear, ringing voice like the voice of a military officer on the battle-field, he cried:

"Number three-twenty-four. Let every voice ring out in song."

Tom Hammond opened the linen-covered book that had been handed to him as he entered, and was almost startled to note the likeness of the sentiment of the hymn to the poem of B. M., which had struck him so forcibly that night in his office.

The major gave out the first verse:

"It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,
When sunlight thro' darkness and shadow is breaking,
That JESUS will come in the fulness of glory,
To take out of the world "His own." "

The major paused a moment to interpolate, "Let the gladness of the thought ring out in your voices as you sing, but especially in the chorus."

"O Lord JESUS, how long?
How long ere we shout the glad song
CHRIST returneth! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Amen !"

The singing of that hymn was a revelation to Tom Hammond. He had heard hearty, ringing, triumphant song at Handel festivals, etc., but among the rank and file, so to speak, of Christians he had never heard anything like the singing of that verse and chorus.

A hundred thoughts and conflicting emotions filled him as he realized, as the hymn went on, that these people were really inspired by the glorious hope of the return of the. CHRIST. Once he shuddered as the thought presented itself to his mind,

"How should I fare if this CHRIST came suddenly - came now?"

Twice over the last verse was sung, the quiet rapture of the singers being doubly accentuated as the glorious words rang out:

"Oh, joy' oh, delight I should we go without dying!
No sickness, no sadness, no dread, and no crying;
Caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory,
When; JESUS receives 'His own.' "

With the last-sung note the voice of the Major rang out again:

“General Sir R. P. - will lead us in prayer.”

The hush that followed was of the tensest. It lasted a full half-minute, then the old general's voice led in a prayer such as Tom Hammond had never even conceived possible to human lips, and such as, certainly, he had never heard before. It awed him, and at the same time revealed to him that real Christianity was something which he, with all his knowledge of men and things, had never before come in contact with.

The prayer concluded, not a moment was wasted. In his clear, ringing tones, the major began:

"Turn with me, if you will, dear friends, to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and the eleventh verse."

Tom Hammond wished that he had a Bible with him. It seemed to him that he was the only person here without one. In an instant every Bible was opened at the passage named. There was no searching, no fumbling. This was another revelation to him.

"They know their Bibles," he mused, "better than I do my dictionary or encyclopedia." But his attention was suddenly riveted on the major, who, pocket Bible in hand, was saying;

“Suffer me, friends, to change one word in my reading, that the truth may come home clearer to our hearts. ‘Ye men of London, . . . **This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.**’ ”

He paused for one instant, then went on: "The second coming of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST is, I believe, the central truth of real, true Christianity at this moment, and it should be carefully, diligently studied by every converted soul. It should be comprehended as far as Scripture reveals it, and so apprehended that we should live in daily, hourly expectancy of that return. Moody, the great evangelist, to whom the whole subject (as he tells us) was once most objectionable, upon studying the Word of GOD for himself, in this connection, was so profoundly impressed with the insistence with which the return of the Lord was emphasized, that he was compelled to believe in it, and to preach it, saying, 'It is almost the most precious truth of all the Bible. Why, one verse in thirteen throughout the New Testament is said to allude to this wondrous subject in some form or another.'

"Many of you who are present this afternoon are not only conversant with this glorious matter, but are living in the glad expectancy of the return of your Lord. But there are sure to be some here to-day to whom the whole subject is foreign, and to you - even if there be only one such - I shall speak as plainly, frankly, simply, yearningly, as though we were *tete-a-tete*.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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