

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

PASSOVER!

COHEN, the Jew, blew out the candle, and set the stand aside. The knees of his trousers were pressed and dusty. He had just been over the whole house, lighted candle in hand, and had searched every nook and cranny, every cupboard, every shelf, under the edge of every carpet, looking for the faintest sign of leaven in the form of bread, cake, or biscuit crumb. He had found nothing, and went to his room to bathe and change his clothing.

"What of you, Zillah?" he had asked the lovely girl! earlier in the day. "With your newly-spoused faith in the Nazarene, shall you partake of the lamb with us?"

"Certainly, I will," she replied, "only I shall take the meal more in the spirit of the Lord's Supper, of the Christian Church. And Abraham -"

Her eyes, as they were lifted to his, swam with tender, pitying tears, as she added:

"All the time I shall be praying that you may meet the CHRIST of GOD, JESUS of Nazareth; and while you seek to remember our people's deliverance from the land of Bondage, I shall be praying that you, dear Abram, may be delivered from the bondage of the legalism of our tradition.

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The Passover table was spread in Cohen's house. The arrangement of that table was a curious mixture of Mosaic and Rabbinical command.

In the case of all but really very pious Jews of this day, the real and actual Passover is not kept.

Passover - (*chag Appesach* of the Jews) must have a lamb roasted to make it the real feast, the ordinary Jew to-day, contents himself with an egg, and a burnt shank-bone of mutton, and unleavened cakes.

Cohen's Passover Feast always included a small lamb. Still, Rabbinical lore and Bible command were curiously mixed in the Cohen celebration.

The table, to-night, had an egg according to Rabbinical order, but there was a tiny roast lamb as well. There was the glass dish of bitter herbs; the salt water, typifying the tears of Israelitish misery in Egypt; a dish of almonds, apples, and other fruit, chopped and mixed, represented the lime and mortar of the Brick-making in the Land of Bondage.

Chervil and parsley were there, and lettuce. A large pile of unleavened cakes, a big colored glass ewer with unfermented wine and water, and many other items considered to be the orthodox thing at the Feast.

All the Cohen household was there. Zillah, radiant with the glow of the new life in CHRIST that had come to her.

Rachel, her sister, was red-eyed and sullen. Zillah had been pleading with her to open her mind, and her heart to the Christian teaching of the Messiah who had come, and who had atoned for all the race, Jew and Gentile alike.

Angry and sullen, the wife had said hard things of Zillah. Her, frivolous, irresponsible nature was more than satisfied with the barest form of the faith of her race.

The two children were full of suppressed excitement, the elder - the boy - especially.

Cohen, the head of the house, was singularly quiet and grave. His eyes had a far-away look in them. He looked like a man moving in a trance.

Presently the boy, (he had been carefully coached) asked, according to the usual formula: "What mean ye, father, by this Service?"

Cohen's eyes stared over the head of his son, and in a voice very unlike its usual tones, replied:-

"It is the Sacrifice of The Lord's Passover, who halted by the blood-sprinkled houses of our fathers in Egypt, that the destroying angel should come not nigh, when He smote the Egyptians, but preserved our fathers."

"Will our people ever do this, father?" queried the boy:-

"Till Messiah come, they will, dear son?" The strained gaze of Cohen, as he answered, was as though he was trying to pierce Time's veil, and see the coming Messiah approaching.

"When will Messiah come, father?" continued the boy. "To-night, perhaps, my son. Set His chair! Open the door!"

Swiftly, but with remarkable quietude, for a child, the boy placed a chair at the table, then, stepping briskly, silently to the door, he set it wide open, and left it thus, and returned to his place by the table.

Rachel took the ewer and poured out a little wine and water into each glass. In her sullenness, as she came to Zillah's glass, she slopped the wine over the edge. The children glanced curiously from the spilled wine to the face of their aunt, then at their father's face.

Zillah's face flushed: Cohen's grew pale, and set in a sharp spasm of pain. No word was said, each took up their glass, and drank the first cup of blessing.

There was a moment's pause, then Cohen spread his hands, bowed his head, and repeated "The Blessing:-"

"The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make His face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us and give us peace."

Under her breath, yet distinctly heard by Cohen, in the solemn hush that followed the Blessing, Zillah murmured:-

"But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. FOR HE IS OUR PEACE."

Cohen glanced quietly at her. She met the glance with one of intense yearning. He translated it rightly, Las meaning "If only you could see this truth?"

There were two bowls of water set on a side-board. Cohen and his wife rinsed their hands in one bowl, Zillah and the two children in the other.

Addressing himself to his son, more than to the others, Cohen, when they had returned to the table, as the head of the house was instructed to do, explained why they sat at the Feast:-

“ 'Our Fathers, when they took the Feast for the first time in Egypt, my son, took it standing, with their loins girt, and their staff in hand, for they were starting on that great journey that eventually lasted forty years. But we, their descendents, eat the feast to-day, sitting at our ease, as a symbol that our people have been delivered from the cruel bondage.'"

Then the first Hallel was repeated. - Psalms 113, and 114. The second cup of Blessing was taken by each.

Then Cohen asked a Blessing on each kind of food on the table. Then he carved a portion of lamb for each one, they took their seats, and the meal began.

The children were excused from eating the stinging bitter herbs. But Cohen, Rachel, and Zillah, each took a little with their lamb and unleavened bread.

Conversation became fairly general over the meal, except that Rachel's sullen anger increased, and she kept silent.

At the conclusion of the meal, the third cup of Blessing was drunk, and Cohen repeated the 115, 116, 117, 118 Psalm. At the close of the Hallel, the fourth, and last cup of Blessing was taken. The Feast was over.

A sudden silence fell upon them all. No one moved, no one spoke, for a moment. Suddenly Zillah broke the dead silence. She had a glorious voice, and she let it ring out in that wondrous song:-

"Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away our stain."

No one interrupted. Cohen could not, for the thrall of some strange, new power was upon him. His wife was furious - but kept her fury bottled up. The children were delighted, they loved to hear their aunt sing, and to the amaze of their father and mother - they joined in the singing, for, with other children, they had often of late been to the evening meeting for Jewish children. And Zillah, who had talked with them, believed that they loved the CHRIST.

Without a break, the three voices sang on:

"But CHRIST the Heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer Blood than they.

"My faith would lay her hand
On that meek head of Thine,
While as a penitent I stand,
And here confess my sin.

"My soul looks back to see
The burden Thou didst bear
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And knows her guilt was there.

"Believing we rejoice
To feel the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And trust His bleeding love."

Again, for full thirty seconds, as the glorious song finished, there was an absolute silence, save for the ricketing of Rachel's chair, as she moved in pettish anger on her seat.

Zillah had kept her eyes fixed upon Cohen's face all the time she was singing, and had seen a strangely wondrous light slowly gather in his eyes. She had known, for days, that he was very, very near to the point of acceptance of CHRIST. Even as they had gathered at the table of the Passover, she was not sure, but that in all but profession and testimony, he was a Christian.

Now he suddenly broke the silence.

"Sing the last two verses again, Zillah" he said.

"My soul looks back to see
The burden Thou didst bear
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And knows her guilt was there.

Zillah's glorious voice rang out. And now, even to her wonder, Cohen's deeper tones joined hers. Her heart leaped as she noted the emphasis he put upon the "My soul."

She sang on. His voice sang on too. Then came the last verse, and in a perfect burst of triumph, his voice rang out:-

"Believing I rejoice
To feel the curse remove;
I bless the Lamb with cheerful voice.
And trust His bleeding love!"

It was a strangely ecstatic moment for Zillah. Tears flooded her eyes, she tried to speak, but her emotion choked her.

Cohen stood up. His face was ablaze with the wonder of the revelation that had come to him. He spread his hands upward, and his eyes were lifted in the same direction, as he cried:-

"Thou loving CHRIST! Thou Precious JESUS! I am Thine – THINE – THINE!"

Then he remembered his wife.

"Rachael, wife of my heart. JESUS is the Messiah!"

"Rachael, dear heart," he cried, as he moved to her side.

"Bah!" she cried. With a thrust of her hand and foot, she kept him from her. Then in tones of withering scorn and disgust, she cried:

"Mehusmed!"

He bent over her very tenderly, stooping to meet her eyes, and trying to take her hand.

The two children clung to Zillah, and the boy suddenly began to pipe out, in his clear treble, the hymn so beloved of Jewish children who attend the mission meetings.

"Come to the Saviour, Make no delay,"

Rachael shot a fiercely angry glance in the boy's direction,. then without looking at her husband, she thrust at him, to prevent his taking her hand, as she cried:-

"Accursed! Mehusmed! Don't touch me!"

"But, Rachael!" he began tenderly.

She flung herself sharply round upon him and spat full in his face. Then she turned sharply from him again.

A full half minute went by. The room grew so eerily still that it startled her. She turned to gaze where the quartette had been.

The room was empty save for herself!

With a cry she started to her feet. They could not have gone out of the door for her chair had all the time stood right in the way. What was this then that had happened?

Her breath came hot and laboured. Her eye-balls bulged horribly! A reeling sickness began to steal over her. She dropped back, terrified, in her chair, gasping:

"Zillah said this morning "The CHRIST will come soon, suddenly, then those who are His, will be taken, unseen, unheard, from the world!"

With a sharp, anguished cry, he let her bulging, terror-filled eyes sweep the room again as she cried:-

"And my children, too!"

Her eyes were tearless, but dry, hard sobs shook all her frame.

The next moment a kind of frenzy seized her. She rushed to the front door, and into the street. She would find out if anyone else was missing.

A little crowd was on the pavement. A hansom cab stood by the curb. The fare was standing on the front board. He was a minister of some kind. He wore a M.B. waistcoat, a clerical collar, a soft, wide-brimmed, black felt hat. He glanced up at the driver's seat, as he cried:-

"But someone, surely, must have seen what became of him. If he fell off his box in a fit, where is his body?"

"I seed him one hinstant," cried a voice from the crowd, "I wur lookin straight at 'im, 'cos I sed to myself, taint often as yer see a keby wear a white 'at, now-adays. Then, while I wur starin' at 'im, he sort o' disappeared, the reins fell on the roof o' the keb, the 'oss stopped, an -"

"He's gone!" shrieked a woman's voice.

It was Rachael. Bare-headed, dressed in all her festal finery, she had just rushed down the steps of the house, and heard the question and answer as to the disappearance of the hansom driver. The crowd turned and faced her, her shrill tones had startled them.

"He's gone to The Lord!" she screamed again. "My husband, my sister, my two children - we were at Passover - we -"

With a piercing shriek she flung up her arms, laughed hideously and fell in a huddled heap on the bottom step of the flight.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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