

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

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(Author of *Mark of the Beast*)

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CHAPTER THIRTY

IN ST. PAUL'S

THE cathedral was packed, packed out to the doors. The aisles, and every other inch of standing-room was a solid Jam. The whole area of the interior showed one black mass of silent waiting, expectant people - it was curious to note that almost every woman had donned black, in some form or other.

The great organ was silent. No one dreamed of singing. The choir seats were full of strangers. The stalls were filled with an indiscriminate crowd. There was no rule, no discipline to-day. Suddenly the tall, square-built form of a certain well-known Bishop, rose near the pulpit. He had linked his arm in that of one of London's most popular Nonconformist preachers, and almost dragged him to his feet.

There was evidently a controversy going on between the two men as to which of them should address the people, each urging the other to lead off. The same thought was in the minds of nearly all who were in view of the pair, namely, "how comes it that a Bishop, and a popular preacher like the Rev. --, have been left behind?"

A strange new tenseness, a deepening silence, settled upon the mighty mass gathered under that great dome. Suddenly the silence was broken by a voice calling:

"Bishop --." Another voice immediately cried, "No! The Rev. --."

A momentary clamour of voices ensued. The voices were not shrill in their eagerness, but sullen, somber, almost savage, in fact. A moment, and the Bishop slowly entered the pulpit. He bowed his head in prayer.

Like the slow, rushing sound of the letting loose of some distant water, the noise of thousands of bending forms filled the place, for everyone bowed the head.

A moment later, the heads were raised. The silence almost of a tomb filled the place, when the first momentary rustle of the up rearing had subsided.

The voice of the Bishop broke the silence; crying: "Men and women of London, fellows with me in the greatest shame the world has ever known - the shame of bearing the name Christian, and yet of being the rejected of CHRIST,- we meet to-day under awful, solemn circumstances.

"We are face to face with the most solemnly awful situation the human race has ever known, if we except the conditions under which, during those three hours of blackness at Calvary, the people of Jerusalem were found, while the Crucified CHRIST hung mid-air, on the Fatal Tree.

"It may be said that our position bears some likeness to that of the people who were destroyed at the Flood. Those antediluvians had one hundred and twenty years warning, we, as professing Christians, have had nearly two thousand years warning, yet, London, England and the whole world has by last night's events, been proved practically heathen - or atheist, atheist will perhaps best fit our character.

"The moment came when GOD called Noah and his family into the ark. But what never occurred to me, until this morning, was the significant fact, that GOD did not shut the door of the ark, or send the flood, until seven days later, thus giving the unbelievers another opportunity to be saved.

"And GOD has given London, England, America, the world, this same extra opportunity of being prepared for the Return of the Lord, and the Translation of His Church.

"For, for some years, now, conferences, and conventions, addresses, Bible-Readings, etc., where this subject of the Second Coming of CHRIST has been specially taught, has been multiplied mightily. I have been present - at some of these gatherings, but, smiling amusedly at what I termed the wild utterances of visionaries, I neglected my opportunity.

"Yet, of all men, I ought to have been prepared for this Coming of the Lord. I have held ministerial office in a church that taught the doctrine, plainly, in many of its prayers and collects. But I see, now, that all through my life, I have been blinded by the letter of things, and have mistaken christening, confirmation, communicating, for conversion, and for life in CHRIST.

"I see, to-day, that I entered the established church of this realm, and not the family of GOD, and the service of CHRIST. I have never really been GOD's, by the New Birth, until last night, when my dear wife, in company with all the waiting, longing church, was suddenly called up to be with her Lord. Not by death, dear friends - she saw no death - but, by that sudden translation, that has startled us all so."

A low sobbing sound ran through all the building. The gathered thousands, almost to a man, realized that they, with the speaker, were equally lifeless, spiritually.

"I was in the room when my wife disappeared," the Bishop went on. "She had been very ill. It became necessary to perform a critical operation on her. I insisted on being present. I see the scene now.

"The nurses standing by the antiseptic baths with the sponges and clips immersed. In the eerie silence of that room, no sound came save the voice of the great surgeon, as he cried 'clip' - 'iodoform' - 'bandages.' Suddenly, as he half turned to take a bandage of the nurse, the form of my precious wife disappeared from the operating table. One of the nurses at the antiseptic bowl, was gone also.

"And I, a professed servant of the CHRIST who had called the translated ones, was left, with the great surgeon, and others, as you, dear friends, many, most perhaps, members of some Christian church, have been left.

"Sister Carrie gone too!" cried the great surgeon, 'then you may depend, Bishop, that CHRIST has come for all His real church, for Nurse Carrie lived in daily, hourly expectation of some kind of translation.' With a puzzled look upon his face, he said, suddenly:

"But, Bishop, how is it that you are left behind, who, of all men in our midst, one would have thought would have gone?"

"I had to say last night to him, dear friends, what, with shame and regret, I have to say to you now, that I ought to have known the Truth, and have been prepared, but because I was unconverted, I had failed to apprehend the fact of the Lord's near Return.

"Yet, how often, on the third Sunday in Advent, have I, with many of you, repeated the Great Truth, in the collect:-

“ ‘O Lord JESUS CHRIST, who, at Thy first coming, didst send Thy messenger to prepare Thy way before Thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of Thy mysteries, may likewise so prepare and make ready Thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at Thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in Thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, ever one GOD, world without end. Amen.'

"In the burial of our dead, too, how often have I recited, and have heard the words,

"Beseeching Thee that it may please Thee, of Thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of Thine elect, and to hasten Thy Kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the True faith of Thy Holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in Thy eternal and everlasting glory; through JESUS CHRIST our Lord.'

"Again, the words of Paul in the matter of the Lord's Supper - **'TILL HE COME!'** ought to have opened my eyes. But I confess, with shame, I have been blind, a blind leader of the blind -"

Visible emotion checked the Bishop's speech, for a moment. Recovering himself, he went on:-

"A blind leader of the blind, because unborn of GOD. I ought to have known that CHRIST's Return was near. I should have known it, had I been spiritually-minded, by the signs of the Apostasy which, (prophesied to precede the Second Coming of the Lord) have been having their fulfillment all around us for years.

"Since last night, I have lived a whole life-time. I have read the whole of the Gospels and Epistles, and, taking my true place as a lost soul before GOD, I have been born of GOD. And now, here, in this solemn moment, I bring to you the Spirit-taught knowledge that has been given to me."

For a few minutes, he traversed ground already covered in these pages, then, continuing, he said:-

"Last Sunday, when, in all the pride of my office, I preached - preached in my unconscious unbelief - I quoted those lines of the poet:-

“ ‘They pass me like shadows, crowds on crowds,
Dim ghosts of men, that hover to and fro,
Hugging their bodies round them like their shrouds
Wherein their souls were buried long ago;
They trampled on their youth, and faith and love,
With Heaven's clear messages they madly strove,
And conquered - and their spirits turned to clay . . .
Alas! poor fools, the anointed eye may trace
A dead soul's epitaph in every face.'

"To-day, friends, I know that 'the anointed eye' must have traced 'The dead soul's epitaph,' in my life, if not in my face.

"Now let us face out present position, as those who are left! What is the future to be? This is what you need to know, what I need to know! First, let me say, the next thing for each to do is to seek the Lord, to cry unto Him for mercy and pardon, while all our hearts are shocked and startled, and our thoughts are turned God-wards. For unless we close with GOD, become His, and live out the future to Him, our portion will be an Eternal Hell." An awful hush rested upon the gathered thousands, as he proceeded:-

"One thing appears very plain from Scripture, that is, that when, last night, CHRIST came into the air and caught up His Church, living and dead, that the Devil, who has been the Prince of the Power of the air, had to descend to earth. CHRIST and Beelzebub can never live together in the same realm.

"In the re-creation of this earth, recorded in Genesis, GOD blessed everything that He created, save the atmosphere, He did not, He could not bless that because Satan, driven from the re-created earth, by the breath of the divine Spirit, had taken refuge in the air. He is therefore called in Scripture, not only the '**Prince of this World,**' but '**THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR.**'

"Now, beloved, the Spirit of GOD has left the earth.

The Devil has taken up his abode here with all his myriad agents, and he is going to make earth as hot for those of us who will witness for GOD, as is hell itself to the lost.

"If we will witness for GOD during the years we are beginning to-day - called the years of 'The Great Tribulation,' they will probably be seven in number, and extend therefore to the dawning moment of the Millennium - if we witness therefore for GOD, I say, during these intervening seven years, we may expect to meet with hideous trial and suffering.

"Antichrist will now soon make himself known - he will be a man, not a system, mind,- he will mislead the Jews, who will now, immediately, return to their own land, and build their New Temple. For a time, Antichrist will appear to be the friend of the Jews, but he will seek to force the most awful idolatry upon them.

The mass of Jewry will accept all this.

"With the Jew, every Gentile will presently be compelled to accept Antichrist, and the Roman Beast -"

A sound of protest was heard from a seat near the pulpit, as the Bishop spoke of the "Roman Beast." But the preacher took no note of the interruption and went on:-

"The Devil will be so mad at being cast down out of heaven, and because he knows such a very limited time to work against GOD, that he will call up all hell to stamp out GOD's people."

For one instant the Bishop paused. He leaned over the pulpit edge, his eyes were full of the light of a holy determination, but into his voice there crept a tender yearning, as he continued:-

"Are we prepared for actual martyrdom? For this will certainly be the fate of many who will not bear about upon them the mark of the Beast."

Again there came a growl from that seat near the pulpit. But the most solemn hush rested upon the vast mass of people.

~ end of chapter 30 ~

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