

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

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(Author of *Mark of the Beast*)

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CHAPTER SEVEN

"COMING"

GEORGE Carlyon's entrance, the arrival of the afternoon mail, and the telegram gave Madge Finisterre an opportunity to escape. George Carlyon was anxious to leave, and Madge rose at once to accompany him.

Tom Hammond did not press them to stay, for he, too, felt awkward. The friends shook hands. The eyes of Madge and Hammond met for one instant. Each face flushed under the power of the other's glance.

When the door had closed upon them, Tom went back to his old place by the table, his eyes involuntarily sweeping the whole apartment. He smiled as he suddenly realized how empty the room now seemed. His glance rested upon the tea-tray, and he rang for the lad Charlie.

"Clear all this away, Charlie, please," he began. Then with a smile he said, "You will find a capital cup of tea in that pot."

The boy grinned. At his first glance at the tray he had mentally decided that he would be able to have a rare feast. A couple of minutes, and the boy had gone.

Tom Hammond gathered up his mail, and was about to drop into his ordinary seat, when he remembered the rocker. With a smile at Madge's occupancy of the chair, he dropped into it. For fully five minutes he sat still thinking, reviewing all the circumstances of the peculiar situation upon which the unexpected coming of George Carlyon had broken.

He asked himself whether he was really in love with the fair Madge, and whether he would have proposed to her if her cousin had not so unexpectedly turned up? He made no definite reply to his own questioning, but turned to his mail.

The telegram he had opened at once on its receipt. He turned now to the letters. He had opened all but two. The last one was addressed in a woman's handwriting. Breaking the envelope, he took out the letter, and turned first to the signature on the fourth page.

"Millicent Joyce," he read. "Millicent Joyce?" he repeated. Unconsciously he had laid his emphasis on the "Millicent," and he forgot the "Joyce."

But suddenly it came to him that the letter was from Mrs. Joyce, the woman whom he had helped to save from drowning on the night of that memorable day when the great chance of his life had come to him.

"Poor soul!" he muttered. "I wonder what she has written about?" The next instant he was reading the letter.

Tom Hammond cast his eyes over the letter which Mrs. Joyce had sent him, and which ran thus:

"Dear Sir,

"I gave you my word that if ever I was in special trouble or need I would write, or come to you for help.

"I did not promise you, however, that if any great joy or blessing should come to me, that I would let you know. I don't think I believed any joy could ever possibly come into my life again. But joy and wondrous gladness have come into my life, and in an altogether unexpected way.

"You will remember how I said to you in parting, that morning, that your strong, cheery words had given me a clearer view of GOD than any sermon I had ever listened to. That impression deepened rather than diminished when I got home. My husband, I heard, had been sent to Wandsworth Prison for a month, for assaulting the police when drunk.

"And in this month of quiet from his brutalities, the great joy of my life came to me. I began to attend religious services from the very first night after my return home. I went to church, chapel, mission hall, and Salvation Army.

"One night I went to the hall of the Mission for Railway Men. A lady was speaking that night, and GOD found me, and saved me. All that I had ever heard from my dear father's lips, when he preached about conversion, came back to me, and that night I passed from death to life.

"The subject of the address was 'The Coming of the Lord.' I listened in amazement as the lady speaker declared that, for this age, GOD evidently meant that this truth of the near coming of CHRIST should have almost, if not quite, the most prominent place in all public preaching.

"I was startled to hear her say that there were nearly three hundred direct references to the second coming of CHRIST in the Gospels and Epistles, and that there were thus more than double the number of references to that subject than even to that of salvation through the blood of the Atonement.

"With her Bible in her hand, she turned readily to a score of passages as illustrations of her statement, and all through her address she never made a statement without backing it up by Scripture. One thing she said laid a tremendous grip upon me, and led me to an immediate decision for CHRIST: she said, 'How often is the possibility of sudden death advanced by a preacher as an incentive to unsaved souls to yield to GOD!

"But how poor an argument is that compared with the near approach of CHRIST! Sudden death might come to one person in a congregation before twenty-four hours, but in a sense, that would touch that one person only. But if CHRIST came to take up His people from the earth - the dead in CHRIST from their graves, the living from their occupations, etc.,- this would affect every unsaved soul in every part of the country, of the world, even.' "

Tom Hammond paused in his reading.

"What on earth can she mean?" he murmured, under his breath. Then he went on from the letter: "I gave myself up to GOD there and then, Mr. Hammond, and am seeking now to live so that, should CHRIST come, even before I finish this letter. I may be ready to be caught up to meet Him in the air."

Hammond paused again.

"What can the woman mean?" he murmured again.

With the letter held in his hand, his eyes became fixed upon space, his mind was searching for something that he had recently heard or read bearing on this strange topic. The clue seemed almost within grasp, yet for awhile he could not recall it.

Suddenly it came to him. A volume of poems had been sent to him for review, amid the excitement of the second day's issue of "*The Courier*." He had glanced rapidly through the book, had written a brief line for his paper, acknowledging the receipt of the book, and promising to refer to it fully at some later date.

"That book," he mused, "had something in it about - about -"

He got up from the rocker, took his place at his table, then wheeled about slowly in his revolving chair, and began searching his book-case. In an instant his keen eye picked out the volume he sought. He wheeled round again to his table, the book in his hand.

He turned a moment to the title-page.

"*Ezekiel and Other Poems*," he read. "By B. M."

"B. M.," he mused, "Whom have I heard writes under those initials?"

Ah! I remember! Mrs. Miller - Barbara Miller."

He ran the gilt-edged leaves rapidly through his practiced fingers, his quick eye catching enough of the running pages to satisfy him.

Suddenly he paused in his search. His eye had lit upon what he sought, and he began to read:

"COMING"

"At even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning."

"It may be in the evening,
When the work of the day is done,
And you have time to sit in the twilight
And watch the sinking sun,
While the long, bright day dies slowly
Over the sea,
And the hour grows quiet land holy
With thoughts of Me;
While you hear the village children
Passing along the street,
Among those thronging footsteps
May come the sound of My feet.

"Therefore I tell you, 'Watch,'
By the light of the evening star,
When the room is growing dusky
As the clouds afar;
Let the door be on the latch
In your home,
For it may be through the gloaming
I will come."

He paused in his reading for a moment, for, like a voice nearby, the drone of that blind beggar's reading came to him, as he had heard it that day on the embankment.

"This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go."

"I remember," he mused, "how that sentence arrested me. My mind was utterly pre-occupied a moment before, but that wondrous sentence pierced my pre-occupation."

His eyes dropped to the poem again, and he read on:-

"It may be when midnight
Is heavy on the land,
And the black waves lying dumbly
Along the sand;
When the moonless night draws close,
And the lights are out in the house;
When the fires burn low and red,
And the watch is ticking loudly
Beside the bed.
Though you sleep, tired out, on your couch,
Still your heart must wake and watch
In the dark room;
For it may be that at midnight I will come."

He read rapidly, but more eagerly interested each moment.

The next section he scarcely paused upon. but the fourth he lingered over, and then read it the second time:

"It may be in the morning,
When the sun is bright and strong,
And the dew is glittering sharply
Over the little lawn;
When the waves are laughing loudly
Along the shore,
And the little birds sing sweetly
About the door;
With the long day's work before you,
You rise up with the sun
And the neighbours come in to talk a little
Of all that must be done:
But remember that I may be the next
To come in at the door,
To call you from your busy work
For evermore.
As you work, your heart must watch,
For the door is on the latch
In your room,
And it may be in the morning
I will come."

He read on with a strange, breathless interest the next two pages of poem.

Then, with a sudden sense of hush upon him, he went carefully over the concluding lines:

"So I am watching quietly
Every day.
Whenever the sun shines brightly,
I rise and say,
'Surely it is the shining of His face!'
And look unto the gates of His high place
Beyond the sea,
For I know He is coming shortly
To summon me.
And when a shadow falls across the window
Of my room,
Where I am working my appointed task,
I lift my head to watch the door, and ask
If He is come;
And the angel answers sweetly
In my home:
'Only a few more shadows,
'And He will come.' "

The face of Tom Hammond, as he laid down the book, was full of a strange, new perplexity. "Strange, very!" he muttered. "Do you know Joyce, Mr. Simpson?" Hammond asked a reporter. "He used to be on the staff of the --"

"Daily Tatler," cried the man. "Knew him well years ago, sir. Old school-fellows, in fact. Got wrong with the drink, sir. Gone to the dogs, and -"

"Have you seen or heard anything of him this last month, Mr. Simpson?"

"Yes, sir. He's grown worse than ever. Magistrate at Bow Street, committing him for three days, said fellow ought to be put in Broadmoor. Pity his poor wife, sir. Perfect lady, sir."

"You know Mrs. Joyce, then?" Hammond queried. The reporter sighed, "Rather, sir! Wished a thousand times I could have had her for a wife, and he'd had mine. I should have had a happier life. And he -"

The man laughed grimly. "Well, he'd have had a tartar!"

Hammond had heard something about the shrewish wife Simpson had unfortunately married. But he had learned all he wanted to know, so dismissed the poor, ill-married fellow.

"I think I must call upon Mrs. Joyce, and learn more about this strange matter of the coming CHRIST," he told himself.

He copied the address from the head of the letter into his pocket-book, then turned to the last letter of his mail.

This proved to be a comparatively short letter; but, to Hammond, a deeply-interesting one. It was signed "Abraham Cohen," and the writer explained that he was a Jew, who had taken the "*Courier*" from the very first number, and had not only become profoundly interested in the recent utterances of the editor in the "Prophet's Chamber" column, but he had, for some days, been impressed with the desire to write to the "Prophet."

"Will you pardon me, sir," the letter went on, "if I say that it would be to your immense advantage, now that your mind has become aroused to the facts and history of our race, if you would get in touch with some really well-read, intelligent Jew who knows our people well, knows their history, past, present, and future, as far as the latter can be known from our Scriptures and sacred books. Should you care to fall in with my suggestion, I should be pleased to supply you with the names and addresses of several good and clever men of our people.

"Yours obediently,
"Abraham Cohen."

As he folded the letter slowly, Hammond told himself that there was something in the letter that drew him towards the writer.

"I will hunt him up, for it is evident that he is as enthusiastic over his people's history as he is intelligent. I will see what to-morrow brings. Now to work."

He put Cohen's letter in his pocket, and turned to the hundred and one editorial claims upon his time.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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