

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WAS HE MAD?

MADGE, a wife of barely eighteen hours, found her husband's church packed in every nook and corner when she entered it on the Sunday morning. The news of her sudden return, and equally sudden marriage, had helped to fill the church, -though the knowledge that the Rev. Doig was to preach would, in itself, have been sufficient to have gathered an unusually large congregation.

During the pastor's sickness the pulpit had been supplied by various good men, secured by the deacons from all over the county. Doig had preached twice before, and was already a great favorite with the people.

The pastor had not been well enough to be present at any service for many weeks, and as he entered the church this morning, leaning heavily upon his wife's arm, he received quite an ovation from the people.

In spite of the curiosity and excitement over Madge's appearance, the congregation speedily settled down to quiet worship. There was something subduing, quieting in the preacher's manner. Just before the address, the people sang:-

"Lo! GOD is here! let us adore,
And own - how dreadful is this place!
Let all within us feel His power,
And silent bow before His face;
Who know His power, His grace who prove,
Serve Him with awe, with reverence, love."

With the singing of this hymn a deep, deep solemnity came down upon the assembly. It deepened as the preacher unfolded the wonders of the Bible revelation relating to the Lord's second coming.

Madge forgot her husband, as, absorbed by the wonder of the revelation, she drank in the glorious truth. Had she been more alert in watching the pastor, she would have seen how restless he grew! How angrily his eyes flashed! How scowling his beetling brows became.

Some of the people noticed their pastor's evident displeasure, and so did one or two of the deacons. But no one dreamed that he would dare to utter any dissent to the service.

Was he mad? Perhaps he was, for the time, as many men and women become, who nurse a groundless, senseless anger and jealousy! He was jealous of this man's hold upon the people. He had not dreamed that any man could hold his congregation, as this man was holding them. He was angry, too, at the doctrine preached.

With a startling suddenness he leaped to his feet, forgetting his weakness, as he cried:-

"I will not have that lying, senseless nonsense - worse than nonsense - preached in my church, Mr. Doig. You will either announce another text, and take a different subject, sir, or you must cease to preach!"

A slight flush rose into the cheeks of the preacher, as he half turned to the pastor, and in low, but firm voice, heard everywhere amid the sudden strained silence, he said:-

"Dear Pastor, if you insist, (you have the legal right to do so, as pastor of this church, I suppose) I will desist. But I cannot, if I preach on, do other than declare all that GOD would have me do. Why, even as we are here, our Loving Lord may come, and if I faltered in my testimony I should have to meet Him ashamedly - and - "

"Rot!" muttered the pastor. The word was heard by everyone, and a murmur of strong dissent ran through the place.

With a white angry face, and flashing savage eyes, the Pastor walked to the table, and leant upon it heavily in his weakness, as he cried hoarsely, "This service is now concluded. While I hold the pastorate, no such sentimental rubbish, as Mr. Doig seems bent upon giving us, shall be voiced from this platform."

One of the deacons protested. The pastor was firm.

Passion had rendered him temporarily irresponsible. Another of the deacons, who had been conferring with Doig - who had whispered the facts of the pastor's evident temporary irresponsibility - now urged the people to disperse quietly.

Doig walked down to his host, and whispered, "if I go at once, it will help matters." The pair then left the church. The congregation followed quickly.

The deacons remained behind to confer together over the situation, which was of a hitherto unheard of character.

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The pastor had left by the side door, and leaning more heavily than ever upon Madge, they made their way to the house of Thaddeus Finisterre, Madge's father. They were staying there. They took a private way, by which they were spared the unpleasantness of meeting any of the congregation.

Four minutes took them to the house. Neither of them spoke during the brief journey. For the first time in her life Madge knew what it was to feel the touch of fear. She had married the man by her side knowing comparatively little of his real character and temperament.

"There may be insanity in his family," she mused, as she walked by his side. She had already told herself that nothing but a temporary touch of madness could have led to his outburst in the church.

Arrived at the house, the pastor went straight to his room, this gave Madge an opportunity to confer with her father and mother a moment.

"His long anxious illness has unsettled his brain a little!" the mother said. "The best thing will be to take no notice, let us all be as cheerful, as much like our ordinary selves, as we can. Then, if we can persuade him to go away to-morrow, I guess the best thing for you to do, Madge, will be to get a good doctor to examine him, and to prescribe for him."

The dinner-meal which followed, presently, was fairly free of constraint. After dinner Mr. and Mrs. Finisterre slipped away and left the husband and wife to themselves. Almost immediately the pair were left, the pastor began to abuse the preacher of the morning, and to denounce the teaching of the Lord's second coming.

"But, my dear," cried Madge, "it is evidently almost the most prominent doctrine in the New Testament. There are more direct references to it in the New Testament, Mr. Doig said, than to any other revealed doctrine."

"But it's not my doctrine," snapped the pastor, "not the doctrine of our church. It was scoffed at at our college, when I was a student, and – and –"

Madge gazed wonderingly at him. His argument seemed so puerile, if not actually sinful.

"But," she cried, "I don't see how that argument holds. To me, it sounds like blasphemy, almost, to say I, as a minister, and we as a church, will not preach the most prominent doctrine of the New Testament, because of the foolish abuse of the teaching by here and there a wild visionary who lets his fancy and whim run away with his judgment. Suppose, dear Homer, some church or minister should say, 'We won't preach the doctrine of the Atonement,' would that save them from the charge of blasphemy, when GOD says:

“ 'If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the Holy City, and from the things which are written in his Book.' ”

The pastor gazed at her in amazement. Her fashion of putting the matter gave him small opportunity of replying, so he took refuge in the coarse sneer: "Have you turned Doigite?"

With a quick flush in her cheeks, and sudden flashing of eye, Madge replied:-

"If by that you mean, do I see, and have I accepted the revelation of the Word of GOD, as to the near coming of CHRIST, then I say 'yes.' I am not a Doigite, but I am, thank GOD, a Christian! A very young one, a very poor and inexperienced one, 'tis true, but still I am one, and am desirous to live to the Lord to whom I have given myself, and, after all I heard from the preacher this morning, I am more than ever determined to serve CHRIST wholly, and I can quite see how this wondrous fact of the near Return of our Lord will be a new and mighty force to revolutionize all my life."

An ugly snarl curled the lips of the amazed, discomfited pastor, and he was just beginning a cruel little speech, when one of the Deacons was announced.

Madge left the two men alone. As she passed on to her own room there was a terrible pain at her heart, for the hideous thought came to her:- "Can Homer be truly converted? If he is, how can it be that he flatly refuses to believe what GOD has so plainly revealed?"

~ end of chapter 22 ~

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