

The BALL of FIRE of GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER and LILLIAN CHESTER

ILLUSTRATED by C. D. RHODES

CHAPTER XXIX—Continued.

"The decision does not lay in your hands, Doctor Boyd," drawled a nasal voice with an unconcealed sneer in it.

Sargent, Cunningham, Manning, and even Van Ploon looked at Clark in surprise. He was not going to open reproof. Chisholm manifested no astonishment.

"The present rector of Market Square church means to have a voice in its deliberations so long as he is the rector!"

"I have been attacked enough on the point of my moral standing!" he declared, his high-pitched nasal voice quavering with an anger he had held below the explosive point during the most of his life.

"You have no authority to speak for me," interrupted Chisholm, his mutton-chops now red.

"Splendor is no longer the exclusive property of religion," resumed the rector, paying no attention to the interruption.

"Perhaps W. T. Chisholm was not shocked by this blasphemy, but the dismay of it sat on every other face, even on that of Nicholas Van Ploon, who was compelled to dig deep to find his ethics.

"You infernal old thief!" wondered Manning, recovering from his amazement. "Was it Divine Providence which directed you to devise the scheme whereby the railroads paid you two dollars rebate on every car of wheat you shipped, and a dollar bonus on every car of wheat your competitors shipped?"

"You'll not find any money which is not tainted," snapped Joseph G. Clark, who regarded money in a strictly impersonal light. "The very dollar you have in your pocket may have come direct from a brothel."

"Or from Vedder court," retorted the rector. "We have brothels there, though we do not 'officially' know it. We have saloons there; we have gambling rooms there; and from all these iniquities Market Square church reaps a profit!"

"This talk is absurd," declared Chisholm. "The city has taken Vedder court away from us."

"Only the property," quickly corrected Rufus Manning, turning to Chisholm with sharpness in his deep blue eyes. "If you will remember, I told you this same thing before Doctor Boyd came to us. I have waited ever since his arrival for him to develop to this point, and I wish to announce myself as solidly supporting his views."

"Your own will not bear inspection!" charged Clark, turning to Manning with a scowl.

"I'll range up at the judgment seat with you!" flamed Manning. "We're both old enough to think about that!"

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tioned in this book; nothing more, nothing less!" and taking a small volume which lay on the table, he tossed it in front of Rev. Smith Boyd.

It was the Book of Common Prayer, containing, in the last pages, the articles of Faith.

Clark seized his hat and coat, and strode out of the door, followed by the red-faced Chisholm, who had also been asked to resign. Nicholas Van Ploon rose, and shook hands with Rev. Smith Boyd.

"Sargent has told me about your plan for the new tenements," he stated. "I am in favor of buying the property."

"We'll swing it for you, Boyd," promised Jim Sargent. "I've been talking with some of the other members, and they seem to favor the idea that the new Vedder court will be a great monument. There'll be no such magnificent charity in the world, and no such impressive sacrifice as giving up that cathedral! I think Cunningham will be with us, when it comes to a vote."

"Certainly," interposed Nicholas Van Ploon. "We don't need to make any profit from those tenements. The normal increase in ground value will be enough."

"Yes," said Cunningham slowly. "I am heartily in favor of the proposition."

"Coming along, doctor?" invited Manning, going for his coat and hat. "No, I think not," decided Rev. Smith Boyd quietly.

He was sitting at the edge of the table facing the Good Shepherd, at the edge of whose robe still sparkled crystalline light, and in his two hands he thoughtfully held the Book of Common Prayer.

CHAPTER XXX.

Hand in Hand.

Rev. Smith Boyd walked slowly out into the dim church, with the little volume in his hand. The afternoon sun had sunk so low that the illumination from the stained-glass windows was cut off by the near buildings, and the patches of ruby and of sapphire, of emerald and of topaz, glowed now near the tops of the slender columns, or mellowed the dusky spaces up amid the arches.

It was hushed and silent there, deserted, and far from the thoughts of men. The young rector walked slowly up the aisle to a pew in the corner near the main entrance, and sat down, still with the little book of Common Prayer in his hand, and, in the book, the Articles of Religion. From them alone must he preach; nothing more and nothing less. That was the duty for which he was hired. His own mind, his own intelligence, the reason and the spirit and the soul which God had given him were for no other use than the clearer support of the things which were printed here. And who had formulated these articles? Men; men like himself.

Rev. Smith Boyd suddenly made the discovery that he was not preaching God! He was preaching the church and its creed!

Startled, now, he went through the thirty-nine Articles of Religion, one by one, slowly, thoughtfully, and with a quickened conscience. Reason knocked at the door of Faith, and entered; but it did not drive out Faith. They sat side by side, but each gave something to the other. No, rather, Reason stripped the mask from Faith, tore away the disguising cloak, and displayed her in all her simple beauty, sweet and gentle and helpful. What was the faith he had been called upon to teach? Faith in the thirty-nine Articles of Religion! This had been cleverly substituted by the organizers of an easy profession, for faith in God, which latter was too simple of comprehension for the purposes of any organization.

For a long time Rev. Smith Boyd sat in the corner pew, and when he had closed the book, all that had been behind the wall of his mind came out and was sorted into heaps, and the bad discarded and the good retained. He found a wonderful relief in that. He had lived with a secret chamber in his heart, hidden even from himself, and now that he had opened the door, he felt free. Above him, around him, within him, was the presence of God, infinite, tender, easy of understanding; and from that God, his God, the one which should walk with him through life his friend and comforter and counselor, he stripped every shred of pretense and worthless form and useless ceremony!

"I believe in God the Creator; the Maker of my conscience; my Friend and Father." The creed of Gall!

For a moment the rector stood, tall and erect, then he stretched forth his arms:

"I know that my Redeemer liveth!" he said, and sank to his knees.

Two high points he had kept in his faith, points never to be shaken; the existence of his creator, his mercy and his love, and the divinity of his son, who died, was crucified and buried, and on the third day arose to ascend unto heaven. Reason could not destroy that citadel in a man born to the necessity of faith! Man must believe some one thing. If it was as easy, as he had once set forth, to believe in the biblical account of the creation of the world as to believe in a pre-existent chaos, out of which evolved the spirit of life, and all its marvels of growing trees and flying birds and reasoning men, it was as easy to go one step further, and add the son to the father and to the holy ghost! Even chaos must have been created!

Fully satisfied, Rev. Smith Boyd walked into the vestry, and wrote his resignation from the rectorship of Market Square church, for he could no longer teach, and preach, faith—in the

thirty-nine articles of religion! Within his grasp he had held a position of wealth, of power, of fame! He scarcely considered their loss; and in the ease with which he relinquished them, he knew that he was self-absolved from the charge of using his conscience as a ladder of ambition! If personal vanity had entered into his desire to build the new cathedral, it had been incidental, not fundamental. It made him profoundly happy to know this with positiveness.

He called up the house of Jim Sargent, and asked for Gall.

"Come over," he invited her. "I want to see you very much. I'm in the church. Come in through the vestry."

"All right," was the cheerful reply. "I'll be there in a minute."

He had been very shy! He was tremendously pleased with himself! He had kept out of his voice all the longing, and all the exultation, and all the love! He would not trust even one vibration of his secret to a cold telephone wire!

He set the door of the vestry open wide. Within the church, the organist had conquered that baffling run in the mighty prelude of Bach, and the great dim spaces up amid the arches were pulsing in ecstasy with the tremendous harmony. Outside, upon the background of the celestial strain, there rose a fluttering, a twittering, a cooing. The doves of spring had returned to the vestry yard.

Just a moment and Gall appeared, poised in the doorway, with a filmy pink scarf about her shoulders, a simple frock of delicate gray upon her slender figure, her brown hair waving about her oval face, a faint flush upon her cheeks, her brown eyes sparkling, her red lips smiling up at him.

He had intended to tell her much, but instead, he folded her in his arms, and she nestled there, content. For a long, long moment they stood, lost to the world of thought; and then she looked up at him, and laughed.

"I knew it from your voice," she said.

He laughed with her; then he grew grave, but there was the light of the great happiness in his gravity.

"I have resigned," he told her.

"That was a part of what she had known."

"And not for me!" she exclaimed. It was not a question. She saw that in him was no doubt, no quandary, no struggle between faith and disbelief.

"I see my way clearly," he smiled down at her; "and there are no thorns to cut for me. I shall never change."

"And we shall walk hand in hand about the greatest work in the world," she softly reminded him, and there were tears in her eyes. "But what work shall that be, Ted?" She looked up at him for guidance, now.

"To shed into other lives some of the beauty which blossoms in our own," he replied, walking with her in



He Folded Her in His Arms.

to the great dim nave, where the shadows still quivered with the under-swooshes of the mighty Bach prelude. "I have been thinking much of the many things you have said to me," he told her, "and particularly of the need, not for a new religion, but for a re-birth of the old; that same new impulse towards the better and the higher life which Christ brought into the world. I have been thinking on the mission of him, and it was the very mission to the need of which you have held so firmly. He came to clear away the thorns of creed which had grown up between the human heart and God! The brambles have grown again. The time is almost ripe, Gall, for a new quickening of the spirit; for the second coming."

She glanced at him, startled.

"For a new voice in the wilderness," she wondered.

"Not yet," he answered. "We have signs in the hearts of men, for there is a great awakening of the public conscience throughout the world; but before the day of harvest arrives, we must have a sign in the sky. No great spiritual revival has ever swept the world without its attendant supernatural phenomena; for mysticism is a part of religion, and will be to the end of time. Reason, by the very nature of itself, realizes its own limitations, and demands something beyond its understanding upon which to hang its faith. It is the need of faith which distinguishes the soul from the mind."

"A sign," mused Gall, her eyes aglow with the majesty of the thought.

"It will come," he assured her, with the calm presence of prophecy it self. "As no great spiritual revival has

ever swept the world without its attendant supernatural phenomena, so no great spiritual revival has ever swept the world without its concentered symbol which men might wear upon their breasts. The cross! What shall be its successor? A ball of fire in the sky? Who knows! If that symbol of man's spiritual rejuvenation, of his renewed nearness to God, were, in reality, a ball of fire, Gall, I would hold it up in the sight of all mankind though it shriveled my arm!"

The thin treble note stole out of the organ loft, pulsing its timid way among the high, dim arches, as if seeking a lodgment where it might fasten its tiny thread of harmony, and grow into a song of new glory, the glory which had been born that day in the two earnest hearts beneath in the avenue of slender columns. The soft light from one of the clerestory windows flooded in on the compassionate son of man above the altar. The very air seemed to vibrate with the new inspiration which had been voiced in the old Market Square church. Gall gazed up at Smith Boyd, with the first content her heart had ever known; content in which there was both earnestness and serenity, to replace all her groping. He met her gaze with eyes in which there glowed the endless love which it is beyond the power of speech to tell. There was a moment of ecstasy, of complete understanding, of the perfect unity which should last throughout their lives. In that harmony, they walked from the canopy of dim arches out through the vestry, and beneath the door above which perched the two gray doves cooing. For an instant Gall looked back into the solemn depths, and a wistfulness came into her eyes.

"The ball of fire," she mused. "When shall we see it in the sky?"

THE END.

EVIDENTLY A HOPELESS CASE

Obstinate Man Determined Not to Admit That the Dictagraph Had Helped Him.

A certain young man of Columbus who is so hard of hearing that he oftentimes carries a little dictagraph in a satchel with him to help him follow the conversation of his friends, was among some of his rural relatives last week. There happened to be a farmer in the vicinity who had not heard a word for years. The Columbus man was introduced to him and referred to his little instrument which helped deaf persons, and offered to demonstrate it to him.

"I can't hear through those things I have tried them all and none of them are any good," he said.

"Put this up to your ear and try it, anyhow," suggested the visitor. The farmer hesitated a while and then put one end of the instrument to his ear. To the surprise of the Columbus man the deaf farmer replied, when asked in a tone hardly above a whisper, "Can you hear what I say?"

"None. I can't hear a word. These things don't do me any good."

"Would you acknowledge it if they would help you?" was then asked him in a still lower tone of voice, and the answer came back promptly: "Certainly I would, but I can't hear a word you say."

The Columbus man put the instrument back in his pocket and said to his rural friend, "A hopeless case."—Columbus Dispatch.

Flying War Horse.

A correspondent of the Milan "Corriere della Sera" reports the following story:

"An Italian lieutenant rode through one of the villages on the Isonzo front. He dismounted before the temporary quarters of the command of his regiment and tied his horse to a tree. When he entered the house he heard the humming noise of a large Austrian shell and a moment later a terrible explosion followed. The shell had struck a small building on the opposite side of the street. An immense cloud of smoke and dust rose and when it disappeared the horse of the officer was gone."

"The air pressure caused by the explosion had lifted the animal from the ground and thrown it on the flat roof of a nearby house, where it was found almost unhurt. It was no easy job to get the horse to the street again, as this could only be accomplished with the aid of a large crane."

Origin of Grain as Measure.

The grain, as a measure of weight, has its name from being originally the weight of a grain of wheat. A statute passed in England in 1266 ordained that 32 grains of wheat, taken from the middle of the ear and well dried should make a pennyweight, 12 of which should make an ounce, while 12 ounces were to make a pound.

The pound, therefore, consisted of 7,680 grains. But several centuries later the pennyweight was divided into 24 grains, which makes the troy pound 3,760 grains. The pennyweight was the exact weight of a silver penny. The standard grain was prescribed by act of parliament in the reign of George IV.

'Gene Field's Humor.

Eugene Field often liked a game of whist in the evening, when he could "drop in" and was not "specially invited." One Sunday night when leaving the house of a friend he called out loudly, for the benefit of the rigid church members connected with the McCormick Theological seminary, across the street: "No, Charles Henry, I shall never play poker with you again on Sunday night, much to the chagrin of Charles Henry, a model man who never indulged in poker on Sunday or any other night."—Elsie F. Well, in McClirde's Magazine.

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