

# The BALL of FIRE

## By GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER and LILLIAN CHESTER

ILLUSTRATED by C. D. RHODES

At a vestry meeting of the Market Square church Gail Sargent listens to discussion about the sale of the church to Edward E. Allison, local traction king, and when asked her opinion of the church by Rev. Smith Boyd, she says it is apparently a lucrative business enterprise. Allison takes Gail riding in his motor car. When he suggests he is entitled to rest on the laurels of his achievements, she asks the disturbing question: "Why?" Gail, returning to her Uncle Jim's home from her drive with Allison, finds out disapproval in the eyes of Rev. Smith Boyd, who is calling there. At a belated party Gail finds the world uncomfortably full of men, and Allison tells Jim Sargent that his new ambition is to conquer the world. Allison starts a campaign for consolidation and control of the entire transportation system of the world. Gail, in a meeting of the seven girls control of transcontinental traffic and arranges to absorb the Vedder court tenement property of Market Square church. Gail visits Vedder court and meeting with Boyd there, tells him that the cathedral Market Square church proposes to build will be out of profits from the school. She becomes the center of magnetic attraction for the men of her aunt's social set. At a meeting of the seven financial magnates of the country, Allison organizes the International Transportation company.

### CHAPTER XI—Continued.

For just one second the rector's mother felt an impulse to shake Tod Boyd. Gail Sargent was a young lady of whom any young man might approve—and what was the matter with Tod? She was beginning to be humiliated by the fact that, at thirty-two, he had not lost his head and made a fool of himself, to the point of tight shoes and poetry, over a girl.

"Why?" and the voice of Mrs. Boyd was not cold as she had meant it to be. She had suddenly felt some tug of sympathy for Tod.

"Well, for one thing, she has a most disagreeable lack of reverence," she stated.

"Reverence?" and Mrs. Boyd knitted her brows. "I don't believe you quite understand her. She has the most beautifully simple religious faith that I have ever seen, Tod."

The Rev. Smith Boyd watched his soup disappearing, as if it were some curious moving object to which his attention had just been called.

"Miss Sargent claims to have a new religion," he observed. "She has said most unkind things about Market Square church. She says that it is a strictly commercial institution, and that its motive in desiring to build the new cathedral is vanity."

He omitted to mention Gail's further charge that his own motive in desiring the new cathedral was personal ambition. Candor did not compel him to act from piqued personal pride.

Mrs. Boyd studied him as he gazed somberly at his fish, and the twinkles once more returned to her eyes, as she made up her mind to cure Tod's irritability.

"I am ashamed of you," she told her son. "This girl is scarcely twenty. If I remember rightly, and I'm sure that I do, you came to me, at about twenty, and confessed to a logical disbelief in the theory of creation, which included, of course, a disbelief in the Creator. You were going to relinquish your studies and give up all thought of the church."

The deep red of the Rev. Smith Boyd's face testified to the truth of this cruel charge, and he pushed back his fish permanently.

"I most humbly confess," he stated, and indeed he had writhed in spirit many times over that remembrance. "However, mother, I have since discovered that to be a transitional stage through which every theological student passes."

"Yet you won't allow it to a girl," charged Mrs. Boyd, with the severity which she could much better have expressed with a laugh. "When you discover that this young lady, who seems to be in every way delightful, is so misled as to criticize the motives of Market Square church, you withdraw into your dignity, with the privilege of a layman, and announce that you do not approve of her. What she needs, Tod, is religious instruction."

She had carefully ironed out the tiny little wrinkles around her blue eyes by the time her son looked up from the profound cogitation into which this reproach had thrown him.

"Mother, I have been wrong," he admitted, and he seemed ever so much brighter for the confession. He drew his fish toward him and ate it.

Later the Rev. Smith Boyd presented himself at James Sargent's house, with a new light shining in his heart; and he had blue eyes. He had come to show Gail the way and the light. If she had doubts, and lack of faith,

and flippant irreverence, it was his duty to be patient with her, for this was the fault of youth. He had been youthful himself.

Gail's eyelids dropped and the corners of her lips twitched when Rev. Smith Boyd's name was brought up to her, but she did her hair in another way, high on her head instead of low on her neck, and then she went down, bewildering in her simple little dark blue velvet cut round at the neck.

"I was afraid that your voice was out," remarked Gail, in a tone suggestive of the fact that that would be a tragedy indeed; and she began halting forth music. "You haven't been over for so long."

Rev. Smith Boyd colored. At times the way of spiritual instruction was quite difficult. Nevertheless, he had a duty to perform. Mechanically he had taken his place at the piano, standing straight and tall, and his blue eyes softened as they automatically fell on the piece of music she had opened. Of course it was their favorite, the one in which their voices had soared in the most perfect unison. Gail glanced up at him as she brushed a purely imaginary fleck of dust from the keys. For an instant the brown eyes and the blue ones met. He was a tremendously nice fellow, after all. But what was worrying him?

"Before we sing I should like to take up graver matters," he began, feeling at a tremendous disadvantage in the presence of the music. To obviate this, he drew up a chair, and sat facing her. "I have called this evening in the capacity of your temporary rector."

Gail's eyelids had a tendency to flicker down, but she restrained them. She was adorable when she looked prim that way. Her lips were like a rosebud. Rev. Smith Boyd himself thought of the smile, and cast it behind him.

"You are most kind," she told him, suppressing the lumps and demons which struggled to pop into her eyes.

"I have been greatly disturbed by the length to which your unbelief has apparently gone," the young rector went on, and having plunged into this opening he began to breathe more freely. This was familiar ground.

Gail rested a palm on the edge of the bench behind her, and leaned back facing him, supported on one beautifully modeled arm. Her face had set seriously now.

"However," went on the rector, "I do not expect to be able to remove the spiritual errors, which I am compelled to judge that you have accumulated, by any other means than patient logic," he resumed. "May I discuss these matters with you?" His voice was grave and serious, and full of earnest sincerity, and the musical quality alone of it made patient, logical discussion seem attractive.

"If you like," she assented, smiling at him with willful deception. The wicked thought had occurred to her that it might be her own duty to broaden his spiritual understanding.

"Thank you," he accepted gravely. "If you will give me an hour or so each week, I shall be very happy."

"I am nearly always at home on Tuesday and Friday evenings," suggested Gail. "Scarcely anyone calls before eight-thirty, and we have dinner quite early on those evenings." She began to be sincerely interested in the project. She had never given herself time to quite exactly define her own attitude towards theology as distinct from religion, and she felt that she should do it, if for no other reason than to avoid making impulsive overstatements. Rev. Smith Boyd would help her to look squarely into her own mind and her own soul, for he had a very active intelligence, and was, moreover, the most humanly forceful cleric she had ever met. Besides, they could always finish by singing.

"I shall make arrangements to be over as early as you will permit," declared the rector, warmly aglow with the idea. "We shall begin with the very beginnings of things, and step by step, develop, I hope, a logical justification of the vast spiritual revolution which has conquered the world."

"I should like nothing better," mused Gail, and since Rev. Smith Boyd rose and stood behind her and filled his lungs, she turned to the piano and struck a preliminary chord, which she trailed off into a tinkling little run, by way of friendly greeting to the piano.

"We shall begin with the creation," pursued the rector, dwelling on pleasure, on the idea of a progress through the mazes of logic, on vague points which he wanted to up for himself.

"And wind up with Vedder," she had not meant to say that, just popped into her mind, and puffed off the end of her tongue.

"Even that will be taken up due logical sequence," and Rev. Boyd prided himself on having ready displayed the patience he had come expressly to exercise.

Gail was immediately aware he was exercising patience. He reproved her, nevertheless, and coldly, for having violated the agreement to take up the different phases of their weighty topic only their due logical sequence. The rector, in this emergency, was found no answer which would test the test, but Gail had the advantage of femininity.

"It altogether depends at which end we start our sequence," she sweetly reminded. "My own impression is that we should begin at Vedder court and work back to the creation. Vedder court needs immediate attention."

That was sufficient. When Allison called, twenty minutes later, they were at it hammer and tongs. There was a bright red spot in each of Gail's cheeks, and Rev. Smith Boyd's cold eyes were distinctly green! Allison had been duly announced, but the combatants merely glanced at him, and finished the few remarks upon which they were, at the moment, engaged. He had been studying the tableau with the interest of a connoisseur, and he had devoted his more earnest attention to Rev. Smith Boyd.

"So glad to see you," said Gail conventionally, rising and offering him her hand. If there was that strange thrill in his clasp, she was not aware of it.

"I only ran in to see if you'd like to take a private car trip in the new subway before it is opened," offered Allison, turning to shake hands with Rev. Smith Boyd. "Will you join us, doctor?"

For some reason a new sort of jangle had come into the room, and it affected the three of them. Allison was the only one who did not notice that he had taken Gail's acceptance for granted.

"You might tell us when," she observed, transferring the flame of her eyes from the rector to Allison. "I may have conflicting engagements."

"No, you won't," Allison cheerfully informed her; "because it will be at any hour you set."

"Oh," was the weak response, and recognizing that she was fairly beaten, her white teeth flashed at him in a smile of humor. "Suppose we say ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

"I am free at that hour," stated Doctor Boyd, in answer to a glance of inquiry from Allison. He felt it his duty to keep in touch with public improvements. Also, beneath his duty lay a keen pleasure in the task.

"You'll be very much interested, I think," and Allison glowed with the ever-present pride of achievement, then he suddenly grinned. "The new subway stops at the edge of Vedder court, waiting."

There was another little pause of embarrassment, in which Gail and Rev. Smith Boyd were very careful not to glance at each other. Unfortunately, however, Rev. Smith Boyd was luckless enough to automatically and without conscious mental process fold the sheet of music which had long since been placed on the piano.

"Why stop at the edge of Vedder court?" inquired Gail, with a nervous little jerk, much as if the words had been jolted out of her by the awkward slam of the music rack, which had succeeded the removal of the song. "Why not go straight through, and demolish Vedder court? It is a scandal and a disgrace to civilization, and to the city, as well as to its present proprietors! Vedder court should be annihilated, torn down, burned up, swept from the face of the earth! The board of health should condemn it as unsanitary, the building commission should condemn it as unsafe, the department of public morals should condemn it as unwholesome!"

Rev. Smith Boyd had been engaged in a strong wrestle within himself, but the spirit finally conquered the flesh, and he held his tongue. He remembered that Gail was young, and youth was prone to extravagant impulse. His spirit of forbearance came so strongly to his aid that he was even able to acknowledge how beautiful she was when she was stifled.

Allison had been viewing her with mingled admiration and respect.

"By George, that's a great idea," he thoughtfully commented. "Gail, I think I'll tear down Vedder court for you!"

CHAPTER XII.

The Survival of the Fittest.

A short, thick old man, gray-bearded and puff-eyed and loaded with enormous, probably, because he heard them so often.

Doctors seem to have some difficulty in explaining the cause from which tune deafness arises, although it is generally agreed that nerves have much to do with it. Musical application depends to a great extent upon the exercise of mental and physical faculties, and the delight in music calls for an alert sympathy between the nerves and the cerebral faculties, without which connection there is a definite musical lack, although the nerves perform their ordinary function of communicating sounds to the mind.

Not Settled Yet.

"Is the head of the house at home?" asked the agent as the mister of the family answered the doorbell. Making no effort to answer the question, the mister person said: "I don't know what line of goods you are introducing or whether they would fit in our establishment or not, that phase of the matter being neither here nor there, but let me tell you something: If you can establish once for all just who is

numerous instances of persons who were denied one of life's chief pleasures.

It has been said of the late Dean Stanley that "he had not a note of music in his head," and could scarcely distinguish one tune from another, a fact which caused his biographer, Rowland E. Prothero, to express surprise that "one so destitute of musical feeling" as Stanley should have been the first person to introduce Bach's Passion music into the religious services of the church.

It is not easy, perhaps, for the average person to understand tone deafness. But just as some people are color blind, so there are others who are melody deaf. Empress Catherine of Russia used to say that she would have given the world to be able to appreciate and love music, declaring that for her "music was noise, and nothing but noise." President Grant is said to have been able to distinguish only two tunes: "Yakkee Doodle" and "Hail to the Chief," which were recog-



preparedness

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meet thy God.—Amos

the word of the nation is to preparation for national defense. Many newspapers and many patriotic citizens are now urging the United States government to prepare for war in the time of peace. This application of the idea to the nation has one strong competitor for consideration and that is preparation for man's eternal welfare. The preparedness first spoken of is in connection with a possible enemy of greater present military strength. God is very strong, and if it is possible for man to so act that he encounters God as an enemy, he is able to meet him?

Meeting God.

What is it to meet God? Man meets God in his everyday obligations. Some of these are communal, while others are individual. Men are as communities and as individuals meeting God and they are enjoying or suffering the consequences. There is a certain meeting of God in death, the soul standing naked before him, and it is a very common expression in connection with the death of anyone to say, "He has gone to meet his God." When a judge in court sentences a prisoner to death he adds, "And may God have mercy on your soul." But the chief thing in mind is the meeting of God in the final judgment. Neither taking a chance, reformation, nor becoming religious will make this preparation; only belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior will do it.

The Outcome of Preparation.

One outcome of such preparation will be an immediate blessing, the establishment of peace with God and the experience of the peace of God. There is the realization of man's true place in the universe. He was created in the image and likeness of God and he can never be "the whole of man," as indicated by the correct reading of Ecclesiastes 12:13, unless he believes in Jesus Christ. There is also deliverance from the power of death, which, while as a lion in the pathway it may terrify, is chained. This outcome means the ultimate, perfect individual and also the perfect social order. Man is not "whole" until he has a sound mind in a sound body, and both of these are the inheritance of the believer in Jesus Christ. A man who does not believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior, is not of a sound mind. The prodigal was not in his right mind when he demanded his father's goods and when he was spending them in riotous living, and it was only when he came to himself; that is, when he resumed rationality and determined to return to his father's house, that he became of sound mind. This sound mind will also be in a sound body. It is the glory of the Christian religion that it promises a body that is incorruptible, powerful, honorable, glorious and like Christ's body. The blind, the deaf, the dumb, the deformed and those lacking members of the normal body, can certainly believe that they will have perfect bodies some day if they meet the conditions that God places on them.

When Shall Man Prepare?

Many who acknowledge the necessity of preparation, put it off until after death, but while there is a most dangerous indifference to this fact on the part of those who theoretically profess it, it is true that preparation must be made before death. It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. That preparation can be completely made now. But, says someone, "That is too rapid, that is practically miraculous, it is a creative act." Precisely so, and nothing less. There is no evolution in regeneration. Jesus, in his talk to Nicodemus, settled the matter of man's right relationship to God in speaking of it as a new birth. That preparation can be made this moment by believing in Jesus Christ.

Two soldiers in the trenches of Flanders, who were brothers and devout Christians, belonged to a regiment which had been ordered to make a charge upon the enemy. The commanding officers said that there would be a very serious business. The younger of the two brothers said to the other, as they went into the smoke and the smothering gases, "Brother, we may not see each other again, but it is all right." The older brother came back wounded, the name of the other was found in the list of those who had been killed, but he was prepared.

Here's a Perfect Electric Bell.

An original electric bell combination is in use in Paris which is designed to get rid of all trouble caused by the question of batteries, for these are now lodged within the apparatus itself. The usual box bell shape is retained, but the arrangement of the parts is different in this case. All the magnet parts are now lodged under the gong itself.

Luther's Trust in God.

Luther's entire reliance upon God, and his distrust of all human ways and means, is clearly set forth in the following passage from a letter to the German elector who befriended him: "No sword can help in this affair. God must act alone—without man's care or aid. Therefore who believes most will be of most protection here. And since I suspect your highness is still weak in faith I can by no means regard you as the man who can protect or rescue me. Since your highness desires to know what to do in this affair, and fancies you have done too little, I answer respectfully that you have already done altogether too much, and should do nothing. If your highness believed, you would see the glory of God; but since you do not yet believe, you have as yet seen nothing. To God be love and honor forever. Amen!"—Christian Science Monitor.

To Be Taken Literally.

The curtain had dropped on the first act of the amateur play. "Ladies and gentlemen," said the youthful stage manager, stepping to the front of the stage, "you will observe that the gram says that there is an interval of two years between the first and second acts. This will be fully carried out. The leading lady has just loved the powder puff under the impression that it was a marshmallow and I think it will be about that before she will be able to go on."

# INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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## LESSON FOR DECEMBER 26

### JEHOVAH'S GRACIOUS PROMISES TO ISRAEL (REVIEW).

LESSON TEXT—Hosea 14.  
GOLDEN TEXT—Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness.—Psa. 103:8 R. V.

The burden of punishment decried upon Israel, not because of the vindictive character of Jehovah, but because of the persistent pursuit of sin on the part of the nation.

The lessons of the past quarter extend from the latter days of Elijah, about 906 B. C., to the fall and captivity of Israel (the northern kingdom) B. C. 722 (Beecher), a period of 180 years. Some contend that the lesson for November 14, Daniel at the King's Court, is chronologically the last and ought to have been put at the end of the series. During the past quarter we have studied about six kings, Ahab, Josiah, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Nineveh, Uzziah and Hosea; also six prophets, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Jonah, Amos and Hosea; and one soldier, Naaman.

A good method of review would be to have assigned to different scholars or classes each of the foregoing personages and to give a report of his chief characteristics. Material for such a review is easily accessible. Another method of review would be to take up the lessons serially and in connection with each read some appropriate Scripture verses that will serve to emphasize or to illustrate the chief fact of each lesson.

Lesson I. The weak King Ahab (strong in his perversity) is easily persuaded to do evil in order to gratify his covetousness. Elijah at God's command goes to meet Ahab who cries out, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" In reply Elijah delivers God's word; that word to us is found in Ex. 20:17. (Let each Scripture reference be read in full.)

Lesson II. The veteran champion Elijah is about to go home and his more youthful follower, Elisha, has one chief desire (see II Kings 2:9), which persistently followed is abundantly rewarded. The lesson for us is found in the master's prayer, John 14:16.

Lesson III. The stricken soldier, Naaman, at a child's suggestion, appeals to God's prophet, Elisha, for healing. He is directed how he may be cured and after some hesitation returns home cleansed. The lesson for us is that of being faithful amid life's experiences and of doing and living for others (see also Romans 12:20, 21).

Lesson IV. The servant of Elisha is very much excited. King and camp are in despair, yet the prophet is not disturbed. Why? Let us read II Kings 6:17. Remember that Jesus, the master of men, refused to avail himself of like angelic assistance in his great battle concerning sin (see Matt. 26:53). Christianity is a religion of love, not of force.

Lesson V. The faithful priest preserves the rightful king, Josiah, and makes a covenant between him and the Lord, viz, that prince, priest and people "should be the Lord's people" (II Kings 11:17). Through the merits of our high priest there has been made a better, even an everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20, 21).

Lesson VI. Again refers to the good king, Josiah. The neglected temple is restored and refurbished through the liberality of the people. This temple is a type of our bodies, which are spiritual temples (Eph. 2:22), and the lesson for us is not only the care of the body, but of liberality towards the work and worship of God's house.

Lesson VII. This is the lesson which is chronologically out of order, but is used for its temperance application. Daniel, the clean youth, staked his life and position upon obeying the word of God (Dan. 1:8). The lesson for us is the exhortation of the apostle Paul (Eph. 5:13-17, see also I Pet. 5:8).

Lesson VIII is the foreign missionary lesson. Jonah's life story is not a flattering one, yet when he faithfully proclaimed God's word it wrought a marvelous transformation in great and wicked Nineveh. (Read carefully Matt. 16:10 and Isa. 55:10, 11). We are to herald, witness to the truth and leave the results with God.

Lesson IX presents Amos, the sturdy prophet of civic and moral righteousness, the great messenger of the "rightness" of things (Amos 5:14). The gist of this lesson for us will be found in the words of Jesus (Matt. 6:33).

Lesson X. Uzziah is that king who could not withstand prosperity and who, in the development of his pride (II Chron. 26:5, 16), assumed to disobey the word of God.

Lesson XI. Enter Hosea. Let the entire school state the message of the prophet to the people of Israel. "I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4). Then let all recite the "little gospel" (John 3:16): "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."