The BALL of FIRE

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CHAPTER XXIX—Continued.

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"The decision does not lay in your hands, Doctor Boyd," drawled a nasal voice with an unconcealed sneer in it. It was clean-shaven old Joseph G. Clark, who was not disturbed, in so much as the parting of one hair, by all the adverse criticism of him which had filled column upon column of the daily press for the past few days. "The rector has never, in the history of Market Square church, been given the control of its finances. He has invariably been hired to preach the gospel."

Sargent, Cunningham, Manning, and even Van Ploon looked at Clark in surprise. He was not given to open reproof. Chisholm manifested no astonishment. He sat quietly in his chair, his fingers idly drumming on the edge of the table, but his mutton-chop beard was pink from the reddening of the skin beneath.

"The present rector of Market Square church means to have a voice in its deliberations so long as he is the rector!" announced that young man emphatically, and Jim Sargent looked up at him with a jerk of his head. Rev. Smith Boyd was pale this afternoon, but there was a something shining through his pallor which made the face alive; and the something was not temper. Rufus Manning, clasping his silvery beard with a firm grip, smiled encouragingly at the tall young orator. "I have said that I have, so far as I am concerned, relinquished the building of the cathedral," the rector went on. "For this there are two reasons. The first is that its building will bring us farther away from the very purpose for which the church was founded; the worship of God with an humble and a contrite heart! I am ready to confess that I found, on rigid self-analysis, my leading motive in urging the building of the new cathedral to have been vanity. I am also ready to confess, on behalf of my congregation and vestry, that their leading motive was vanity!"

"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. "If I thought, however, that the building of that cathedral would promote the spread of the gospel in a degree commensurate with the outlay, I would still be opposed to the erection of the building; for the money does not belong to us!"

"Go right on and develop our conscience," approved Manning, smiling up at the old walnut-beamed ceiling with its carved cherub brackets.

"The money belongs to Vedder court," declared the rector; "to the distorted moral cripples which Market Square church, through the accident of commerce, has taken under her wing. Gentlemen, in the recent revelations concerning the vast industrial interests of the world, I have seen the whole blackness of modern corporate methods; and Market Square church is a corporation! I wish to ask you, in how far the Market Square church has been swayed, in its commercial dealings, by moral considerations?"

He paused, and glanced from man to man of his vestry. Sargent and Manning, the former of whom knew his plans and the latter of whom had been waiting for them to mature, smiled at him in perfect accord. Nicholas Van Ploon sat quite placidly, with his hands folded over his creaseless vest. Willis Cunningham, stroking his sparse brown Vandyke, looked uncomfortable, as if he had suddenly been introduced into a rude brawl; but his eye roved occasionally to Nicholas Van Ploon, who was two generations ahead of him in the acquisition of wealth, by the prilliant process of allowing property to increase in valuation. Chisholm glared.

"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! For the glory of God? I dare you, Joseph G. Clark, or W. T. Chisholm, to answer me that question in the affirmative! No decent man would conduct the business we do, for the reason that it would soil his soul as a gentleman; and it is a shameful thing that a gentleman should have finer ethics than a Christian church! In the beginning, I was a coward about this matter! It was because I wished to be rid of our responsibility in Vedder court that I first urged the conversion of that property into a cathedral. We cannot rid ourselves of the responsibility of Vedder court! If it were possible for a church to be sent to hell, Market Square church would be eternally damned if it took this added guilt upon it!"

"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!"

Joseph G. Clark jumped to his feet and, leaning across the table, shook a thin forefinger at Manning.

"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. "I can stand the attacks of a sensational press, but when spiteful criticism follows me into my own vestry, almost in the sacred shadow of the altar itself, I am compelled to protest! I wish to state to this vestry, once and for all, that my moral status is above reproach, and that my conduct has been such as to receive the commendation of my Maker! Because it has pleased Divine Providence to place in my hands the distribution of the grain of the fields, I am constantly subject to the attacks of envy and malice! It has gone so far that I, last night, received from Rev. Smith Boyd, a request to resign from this vestry!" He paused in triumph on that, as if he had made against Rev. Smith Boyd a charge of such ghastly infamy that the young rector must shrivel before his eyes. "I have led a blameless life! I have never smoked nor drunk! I have paid every penny I ever owed and fulfilled every promise I ever made. I have obeyed the gospel and partaken of the sacraments, and the Divine Being has rewarded me abundantly! He has chosen me, because of my faithful stewardship, to gather the food of earth from its sources and feed it to the mouths of the hungry; and I shall not depart from my stewardship in this church, because I am here, as I am everywhere, by the will of God!"

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? I could give you a string of sins as long as the catechism and you dare not deny one of them, because I can prove them on you! And yet you have the effrontery to say that a Divine Providence would establish you in your monopoly, by such scoundrelly means as you have risen to become the greatest dispenser of self-advertising charities in the world! You propose to ride into heaven on your universities and your libraries, and on the fact that you never smoked nor drank nor swore nor gambled; but when you come face to face with this horrible new god you have created, a deity who would permit you to attain wealth by the vile methods you have used, you will find him with a pitchfork in his hands! I am glad that Doctor Boyd, though knowing your vindictive record, has had bravery enough to demand your resignation from this vestry! I hope he receives it!"

Joseph G. Clark had remained standing, and his head shook, as with palsy, while he listened to the charge of Manning. He was a very old man, and it had been quite necessary for him to restrain his passions throughout his life.

"You will go first!" he shouted at Manning. "I am impregnable; but you have no business on this vestry! You can be removed at any time an examination is ordered, for I have heard you, we have all heard you, deny the immaculate conception, and thereby the divinity of Christ, in whom alone there is salvation!"

A hush like death fell on the vestry. Rev. Smith Boyd was the first to break the ghastly silence.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I do not think that we are in a mood today for further discussion. I suggest that we adjourn."

His voice seemed to distract the attention of Clark from Manning, at whom he had been glowering. He turned on Rev. Smith Boyd the remainder of the wrath which marked his first break into senility.

"As for you!" he snarled, "you will keep your fingers out of matters which do not concern you! You were hired to preach the gospel, and you will confine your attention to that occupation, preaching just what you find sanctioned 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 clever 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 Gail!

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 evoluted 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 Gail.

"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 sly! 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 Gail 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, happy 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 exulted. 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-echoes 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, Gail, 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 Gail, her eyes aglow with the majesty of the thought.

"It will come," he assured her, with the calm prescience of prophecy itself. "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 concreted 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, Gail, 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. Gail 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 Gail 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 instrument 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?"

"Nope, 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 recently rode through one of the villages on the Isonzo front. He dismounted before the temporary quarters of the commander of his regiment and tied his horse to a tree. When he entered the house he heard the humming poise 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 5,760 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. Weil, in McBride's Magazine.

Temperance

(Conducted by the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union.)

ANTI-LIQUOR SENTIMENT.

In an article showing that "the greatest nations in Europe are against alcohol," the Philadelphia North American has this to say about Germany:

"Is it not disconcerting to find that the great anti-alcohol movement which is sweeping Europe had its beginning in the land of the 14,000 breweries? A scientific pamphlet written in 1886 by Professor van Bunge, was the start of a campaign which has produced an anti-liquor congress in every advanced country on the continent, and a biennial international congress that draws delegates from nearly every considerable nation.

"The growth of sentiment against the evil has been almost incredible. In the year 1893 there was only one known total abstainer of prominence in the German empire, a noted Hamburg engineer. In 1897 a leading physician undertook to urge abstinence upon members of his profession, and after months of work found himself with a total of nine signatures; but ten years later 800 physicians had joined.

"It was a German university, that of Berlin, which first established a scientific course on the alcohol evil, in 1906. It was the German kaiser who a few years ago declared himself an abstainer, and enjoined the army and navy to follow his example. It is a noted German army physician who has declared: 'It must be considered incompatible with the honor of a city or government to allow the activities of poison factories, such as breweries and distilleries.' . . . There is a strong anti-liquor movement among the Socialists. For more than three years the sale of beer in the great Krupp works has been forbidden. That and other big industries —steel works, shipyards and mines— supply tea free to their workers, or milk at cost, and forbid the sale of beer. At one huge plant the consumption of beer fell from 147,000 barrels in 1909 to 14,500 barrels in 1911. The Berlin railways have forbidden the use of beer during working hours, and similar action has been taken by the government railways of Baden and Alsace-Loraine, where anti-alcohol placards are posted in all the stations."

DOOLEY ON JOHN BARLEYCORN.

"It's strange, Hinnissy, how th' wurruld has turned agin its lifelong roommate, Jawn Barleycorn. Afther rollickin' with th' old fellow f'r cinchries th' fickle public has rounded on him an' is rapidly chasin' him off th' map. I've told ye how it is in England. It's th' same ivrywhere. In Rooshya th' polis has stopped th' sale iv vodky, which is th' name iv th' Rooshyan naytional brainstorm. In France they've f'rbid th' cityzin to take his tumbler of absinthe.

"Jawn Barleycorn might have gone on f'r years if 't hadn't been that th' wurruld began to suspect that he was no good in a fight. That knocked th' last leg fr'm undher him. I cud've told th' wurruld so long ago. I've seen him start a millyon fights, but niver seen him win wan. He's lived f'r years on his repytation as a warryor. No army was supposed to be anny good without him. He was welcome in th' sojers' tent an' th' gin'ral's headquarters. People said about him: 'He's a scamp and a false friend, but he's a divvle in a scrap.' An' now they know he ain't anny good at that ayether. His bluff has been called."

NOT ALTOGETHER SELFISH.

"It is not altogether for purely economic reasons that industrial concerns oppose drinking on the part of their employees," says President Gibson of the Chicago Pressed Steel company. "The average employer is greatly interested in the welfare of his work-people. He wants to see them prosperous and happy. He also wants to get the largest possible returns in his business and there is no conflict between these two aims. Whatever improves the physical, mental and moral conditions of workmen also increases their efficiency and so brings in greater profits to the employer."

BOOZE.

Did it ever do you any good?

Did it ever help you get a better job?

Did it ever bring happiness into your family?

These sentiments in poster form were prominently displayed at the annual convention of the National Safety council in Philadelphia. The 2,000 delegates represented billions of capital and 1,500 separate firms. The railroad delegates called attention to the fact that the casualties among abstaining railroad employees are going down while the casualties to the general public are going up.

NO WINE FOR FANG.

Samuel G. Blythe, who told in a recent book how he went on the water wagon and stayed there, lately interviewed Wu Ting Fang, in Shanghai, and told about that in The Saturday Evening Post. He asked the Chinese statesman what he eats and, finally, what he drinks. "Do you take any wine?" inquired Mr. Blythe. Mr. Wu looked at him in amazement. "Wine!" he exclaimed. "Of course not! Wine is a poison. I occasionally drink a little grape juice, but no wine or any liquors."