

THE BALL OF FIRE

By GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER
and LILLIAN CHESTER

ILLUSTRATED BY C. D. RHODES

(Copyright, 1914, by the Red Book Corporation.)

CHAPTER I.

No Place for Sentiment.

Silence pervaded the dim old aisles of the Market Square church; the winter sun, streaming through the clerestory windows, cast, on the floor and on the vacant benches, patches of ruby and sapphire, of emerald and of topaz, these seeming only to accentuate the dimness and the silence.

In that silence the vestry door creaked, it opened wide, and it was as if a vision had suddenly been set there! Bathed in the golden light from the transept window, brown-haired, brown-eyed, rosy-cheeked, stood a girl who might have been one of the slender stained-glass virgins come to life, the golden light flaming the edges of her hair into an aureole. She stood timidly, peering into the dimness, and on her beautifully curved lips was a half questioning smile.

"Uncle Jim," she called, and there was some quality in her low voice which was strangely attractive, and disturbing.

"By George, Gail, I forgot that you were to come for me!" said Jim Sargent, rising from amid the group of men in the dim transept. "We'll be through in a few minutes. Allison, you were about to prove something to us, I think."

"Prove is the right word," agreed the stockily built man who had evidently been addressing the vestry. He was acutely conscious of the presence of Gail, as they all were. "Your rector suggests that this is a matter of sentiment. You are anxious to have fifty million dollars to begin the erection of a cathedral; but I came here to talk business, and that only. Granting you the full normal appreciation of your Vedder Court property, and the normal increase of your aggregate rentals, you cannot have, at the end of ten years, a penny over forty-two millions. I am prepared to offer you, in cash, a sum which will, at three and a half per cent, and in ten years, produce that exact amount. To this I add two million."

"How much did you allow for increase in the value of the property?" asked Nicholas Van Ploon, whose only knowledge for several generations had been centered on this one question. The original Van Ploon had bought a vast tract of Manhattan for a dollar an acre, and, by that stroke of towering genius, had placed the family of Van Ploon, for all eternity, beyond the necessity of thought.

For answer, Allison passed him the envelope upon which he had been figuring, checking off an item as he did so. He noticed that Gail's lips twitched with suppressed mirth. She turned abruptly to look back at the striking transept window, and the three vestrymen in the rear pew immediately sat straighter. Willis Cunningham, who was a bachelor, hastily smoothed his Vandyke. He was so rich, by inheritance, that money meant nothing to him.

"Not enough," grunted Van Ploon, handing back the envelope and twisting again in the general direction of Gail.

"Ample," retorted Allison. "You can't count anything for the buildings. While I don't deny that they yield the richest income of any property in the city, they are the most decrepit tenements in New York. They'll fall down in less than ten years. You have them propped up now."

Jim Sargent glanced solicitously at Gail, but she did not seem to be bored; not a particle!

"They are passed by the building inspector annually," pompously stated W. T. Chisholm, his mutton chops turning pink from the reddening of the skin beneath. He had spent a lifetime in resenting indignities before they reached him.

"Building inspectors change," insinuated Allison. "Politics is very uncertain."

Four indignant vestrymen jerked forward to answer that insult.

"Gentlemen, this is a vestry meeting," sternly reproved the Rev. Smith Boyd, advancing a step, and seeming to feel the need of a gavel. His rich, deep barytone explained why he was rector of the richest church in the world.

Gail's eyes were dancing, but otherwise she was demureness itself as she studied, in turns, the members of the richest vestry in the world. She estimated that eight of the gentlemen then present were almost close enough to the anger line to swear. They numbered just eight, and they were most interesting! And this was a vestry meeting!

"The topic of debate was money, I believe," suggested Rufus Manning, rescuing his sense of humor from somewhere in his beard. He was the infidel member. "Suppose we return to it. Is Allison's offer worth considering?"

"Why?" inquired the nasal voice of clean-shaven old Joseph G. Cook, who was sarcastic in money matters. The Standard Cereal company had attained its colossal dimensions through rebates; and he had invented the de-

vice! "The only reason we'd sell to Allison would be that we could get more money than by the normal return from our investment."

"I've allowed two million for the profit of Market Square church in dealing with me," stated Allison, again proffering the envelope which no one made a move to take. "I will not pay a dollar more."

W. T. Chisholm was suddenly reminded that the vestry had a moral obligation in the matter under discussion. He was president of the Majestic Trust company, and never forgot that fact.

"To what use would you devote the property of Market Square church?" he gravely asked.

"The erection of a terminal station for all the municipal transportation in New York," answered Allison; "subways, elevateds, surface cars, traction lines! The proposition should have the hearty co-operation of every citizen."

Simple little idea, wasn't it? Gail had to think successively to comprehend what a stupendous enterprise this was; and the man talked about it as modestly as if he were planning to



And This Was a Vestry Meeting.

sod a lawn; more so! Why, back home, if a man dreamed a dream so vast as that, he just talked about it for the rest of his life; and they put a poet's wreath on his tombstone.

"Now you're talking sentiment," retorted stubby-mustached Jim Sargent. "You said, a while ago, that you came here strictly on business. So did we. This is no place for sentiment!"

Rufus Manning, with the tip of his silvery beard in his fingers, looked up into the delicate graining of the apex, where it curved gracefully forward over the head of the famous Henri Dupre's crucifix, and he grinned. Gail Sargent was looking contemptively from one to the other of the grave vestrymen.

"You're right," conceded Allison curtly. "Suppose you fellows talk it over by yourselves, and let me know your best offer."

"Very well," assented Jim Sargent, with an indifference which did not seem to be assumed. "We have some other matters to discuss, and we may as well thrash this thing out right now. We'll let you know tomorrow."

Gail looked at her watch and rose energetically.

"I shall be late at Lucile's, Uncle Jim. I don't think I can wait for you."

"I'll be very happy to take Miss Sargent anywhere she'd like to go," offered Allison, almost instantaneously.

"Much obliged, Allison," accepted Sargent heartily; "that is, if she'll go with you."

"Thank you," said Gail simply, as she stepped out of the pew.

The gentlemen of the vestry rose as one man. Old Nicholas Van Ploon even attempted to stand gracefully on one leg, while his vest bulged over the back of the pew in front of him.

"I think we'll have to make you a permanent member of the vestry," smiled Manning, the patriarch, as he bowed his adeous. "We've been needing a brightening influence for some time."

Willis Cunningham, the thoughtful one, wedged his Vandyke between the heads of Standard Cereal Clark and Banker Chisholm.

"We hope to see you often, Miss Sargent," was his thoughtful remark.

"I mean to attend services," returned Gail graciously, looking up into the organ loft, where the organist was making his third attempt at that baffling run in the Bach prelude.

"You haven't said how you like our famous old church," suggested the Rev. Smith Boyd with pleasant ease, though he felt relieved that she was going.

The sudden snap in Gail's eyes fairly scintillated. It was like the shattering of fine glass in the sunlight.

"It seems to be a remarkably lucrative enterprise," she smiled up at him, and was rewarded by a snort from Manning. Allison frankly guffawed. The balance of the sedate vestry was struck dumb by the impertinence.

Gail felt the eyes of the Rev. Smith Boyd fixed steadily on her, and turned to meet them. They were cold. She had thought them blue; but now they were green! She stared back into them for a moment, and a little red spot came into the delicate tint of her oval cheeks; then she turned deliberately to the marvelously beautiful big transept window. It had been designed by the most famous stained-glass artist in the world, and its subject lent itself to a wealth of color. It was Christ turning the money changers out of the temple!

CHAPTER II.

"Why?"

"Snow!" exclaimed Gail in delight, turning up her face to the delicate flakes. "And the sun shining. That means snow tomorrow!"

Allison helped her into his big, piratical-looking runabout, and tucked her in as if she were some fragile hot-house plant which might freeze with the first cool draft.

"The pretty white snow is no friend of mine," he assured her, as he took the wheel and headed toward the avenue. He looked calculatingly into the sky. "This particular downfall is likely to cost the Municipal Transportation company several thousand dollars."

"I'm curious to know the commercial value of a sunset in New York," Gail smiled up at him. Allison had the impression that under the cover of her exquisitely veiled lids she was looking at him cornerwise, and having a great deal of fun all by herself.

"We haven't capitalized sunsets yet, but we have hopes," he laughed.

"Then there's still a commercial opportunity," she lightly returned. "I feel quite friendly to money, but it's so intimate here. I've heard nothing else since I came, on Monday."

"Even in church," he chuckled. "You delivered a reckless shock to Rev. Smith Boyd's vestry."

"Well?" she demanded. "Didn't he ask my opinion?"

"I don't think he'll make the mistake again," and Allison took the corner into the avenue at a speed which made Gail, unused to bare inches of leeway, class Allison as a demon driver. The tall traffic policeman around whose upraised arm they had circled smiled a frank tribute to her beauty, and she felt relieved. She had cherished some feeling that they should be arrested.

"However, even a church must discuss money," went on Allison, as if he had just decided a problem to which he had given weighty thought. "Fifty millions isn't mere money," retorted Gail; "it's criminal wealth. If no man can make a million dollars honestly, how can a church?"

Allison swerved out into the center of the avenue and passed a red limousine before he answered. He had noticed that everybody in the street stared into his car, and it flattered him immensely to have so pretty a girl with him.

"The wealth of Market Square church is natural and normal," he explained. "It arises partly from the increase in value of property which was donated when practically worthless. Judicious investment is responsible for the balance."

"Oh, bother!" and Gail glanced at him impatiently. "Your natural impulse is to defend wealth because it is wealth; but you know that Market Square church never should have had a surplus to invest. The money should have been spent in charity. Why are they saving it?"

Allison began to feel the same respect for Gail's mental processes which he looked for a man's, though, when he looked at her with this thought in mind, she was so thoroughly feminine that she puzzled him more than ever.

"Market Square church has an ambition worthy of its vestry," he informed her, bringing his runabout to rest, with a swift glide, just an accurate three inches behind the taxi in front of them. "When it has fifty million dollars, it proposes to start building the most magnificent cathedral on American soil."

"Why?" she pondered. "Will a fifty million dollar cathedral save souls in proportion to the amount of money invested?"

Allison enjoyed that query thoroughly. "You must ask Rev. Smith Boyd," he chuckled. "You talk like a heathen!"

"Oh, no," returned Gail gravely, and with a new tone. "I pray every morning and every night, and God hears me." The note of reverence in her voice was a thing to which Allison gave instant respect. "I have no quarrel with religion. Why, Mr. Allison, I love the church." Her eyes were glowing, the same eyes which

had closed in satirical mischief. Now they were rapt. "What a stunning collier!" she suddenly exclaimed.

Allison, who had followed her with admiring attention, his mind accompanying hers in eager leaps, laughed in relief. After all, she was a girl—and what a girl! The exhilaration of the drive, and of the snow beating in her face, and of the animated conversation, had set the clear skin of her face aglow with color. Her deep red lips, exquisitely curved and half parted, displayed a row of dazzling white teeth, and the elbow which touched his was magnetic. Allison refused to believe that he was forty-five!

"You're fond of colliers," he guessed, surprised to find himself with an eager interest in the likes and dislikes of a young girl. It was a new experience.

"I adore them!" she enthusiastically declared. "Back home, I have one of every marking but a pure white."

There was something tender and wistful in the tone of that "back home." No doubt she had hosts of friends and admirers there, possibly a favored suitor. It was quite likely. A girl such as Gail Sargent could hardly escape it. If there was a favored suitor Allison rather pitied him, for Gail was in the city of strong men. Busy with an entirely new and strange group of thoughts, Allison turned into the park, and Gail uttered an exclamation of delight as the fresh, keen air whipped in her face. The snow was like a filmy white veil against the bare trees, and enough of it had clung, by now, to outline, with silver pointing, the lacework of branches. On the turf, still green from the open winter, it lay in thin white patches, and squirrels, clad in their sleek winter garments, were already scampering to their beds, crossing the busy drive with the adroitness of accomplished metropolitan pedestrians, their bushy tails hopping behind them in ungainly loops.

The pair in the runabout were silent, for the east drive at this hour was thronged with outward-bound machines, and the roadway was slippery with the new-fallen snow. Steady of nerve, keen of eye, firm of hand! Gail watched the alert figure of Allison, tensely and yet easily motionless in the seat beside her.

Perhaps feeling the steady gaze, Allison turned to her suddenly, and for a moment the gray eyes and the brown ones looked questioning into each other, then there leaped from the man to the woman a something which held her gaze a full second longer than she would have wished.

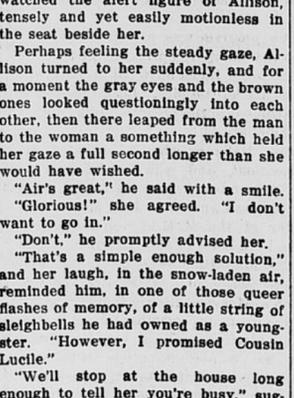
"Air's great," he said with a smile. "Glorious!" she agreed. "I don't want to go in."

"Don't," he promptly advised her. "That's a simple enough solution," and her laugh, in the snow-laden air, reminded him, in one of those queer flashes of memory, of a little string of sleighbells he had owned as a youngster. "However, I promised Cousin Lucile."

"We'll stop at the house long enough to tell her you're busy," suggested Allison, as eager as a boy.

"Let's!" cried Gail, and, with a laugh which he had discarded with his first business promotion, Allison threw out another notch of speed, and whirled from the Seventy-second street entrance up the avenue to the proper turning, and half way down the block, where he made a swift but smooth stop, bringing the step with marvelous accuracy to within an inch of the curb.

She flashed at him a smile and ran up the steps. She turned to him again as she waited for the bell to be answered, and nodded to him with frank comradery. Two vivacious-looking



Gail Watched the Alert Figure of Allison, Tensely Motionless Beside Her.

women, one tall and black-haired and the other petite and blonde, and both fashionably slender and both pretty, rushed out into the hall and surrounded her.

For an instant, Edward E. Allison had a glimpse of her, in her garnet and turquoise, flanked by a sprightly vision in blue and another sprightly vision in pink, and he thought he heard the suppressed sounds of tittering; then the door closed, and the lace curtains of the hall windows bulged outward, and Gail came tripping down the steps.

They raced up and into the park, and around the winding driveways with the light-hearted exhilaration of children, and if there was in them at that moment any trace of mature

thought, they were neither one aware of it. They were glad that they were just living, and moving swiftly in the open air, glad that it was snowing, glad that the light was beginning to fade, that there were other vehicles in the park, that the world was such a bright and happy place; and they were quite pleased, too, to be together.

It was still light, though the electric lamps were beginning to flare up through the thin snow veil, when they rounded a rocky drive, and came in view of a little lookout house perched on a hill.

"Oh!" called Gail, involuntarily putting her hand on his arm. "I want to go up there!"

The work of Edward E. Allison was well-nigh perfection. He stopped the runabout exactly at the center of the pathway, and was out and on Gail's side of the car with the agility of a youngster after a robin's egg. He helped her to alight, and would have helped her up the hill with great pleasure, but she was too nimble and too eager for that, and was in the lookout house several steps ahead of him.

When she was quite finished with the view, and turned and went down the hill, one of her tiny French heels slid, and she might have fallen, had it not been for the ironlike arm which he threw back to support her. For just an instant she was thrown fairly in his embrace, with his arm about her waist, and her weight upon his breast; and, in that instant, the fire which had been smoldering in him all afternoon burst into flame. With a mighty repression he resisted the impulse to crush her to him, and handed her to the equilibrium which she instinctively sought, though the arm trembled which had been pressed about her. His heart sang, as he helped her into the machine, and sprang in beside her. He felt a savage joy in his strength as he started the car and felt the wheel under his hard grip. He was young, younger than he had ever been in his boyhood; strong, stronger than he had ever been in his youth. What worlds he might conquer now with this new blood racing through his veins. It was as if he had been suddenly thrust into the fires of eternal life, and endowed with all the vast, irresistible force of creation!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

REASON FOR HIS BRAGGING

British Soldier Felt He Had to Lie About His Wonderful Deeds in the Field.

An officer was surprised one day when searching the letters of his detachment to read in one of them a passage that was something like this: "We have just got out of shell-fire for the first time for two months. It has been a hard time. The Germans were determined to take our field bakery, but, by gee! we would not let them. We killed them in thousands."

This was a letter from one of the bakers to his wife. None of the detachment had been a mile from the base, and they had never seen a German, except as a prisoner. My friend knew the writer well, and could not help (although it was none of his business) asking him why he told such terrible lies to his poor wife. The soldier said:

"It's quite true what you say, but it's like this, sir. When my wife and the wives of the other men in the place where I live are talking it all over in the morning I couldn't think to let her have nothing to say and the others all bragging about what their men had done with the Germans. That's the way of it, sir."—Manchester Guardian.

Movies Aid Physicians.

The movies have invaded even the sacred field of science. The latest up-to-the-minute discovery is the peculiar value of the movies in diagnosis. It was made several weeks ago by osteopathic physicians and will be demonstrated first at the world's congress of osteopathic physicians, in Portland, Ore., the first week in August.

At a meeting of osteopathic physicians of the district, held at the home of Dr. Clara U. Little, Dr. Chester W. Swope, a member of the board of trustees of the national association, explained how Dr. J. Ivan Dufur, professor of nervous diseases of the Philadelphia College of Osteopathy, had become the latest hero of the movies. For more than four hours Doctor Dufur and the movie men were locked in a room with more than forty insane epileptics, waiting to snap just the right kind of fits. They also had many harrowing experiences.

Moving pictures, it is predicted, will revolutionize the teaching of disease diagnosis, as these subjects can in no other way be so vividly presented to the student.

George Evidently Not a Caruso.

Her son had enlisted and she was a proud old woman as she harangued a knot of friends on the village street. "Garge always done 'is duty by me, 'e 'as, an' now 'e's doin' 'is duty by king 'an country," she said. "I feel right down sorry for them Germans, to think of 'im goin' into battle with 'is rifle in 'is 'and and 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' on 'is lips." "Poor Germans, indeed!" exclaimed one of the audience. "Pity's wasted on 'em! Praps you 'aven't 'eard of their cruelties?" "Praps I 'aven't," agreed the old lady. "An' praps you 'aven't 'eard Garge sing."—London Mail.

Where Judge Draws the Line.

George Johnson—That I love publicity I never will deny, but I never walk from coast to coast to get it.

—Acheson Globe.

Temperance

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

EFFECTS OF BEER DRINKING.

The political strength of liquor is furnished by the wine and beer drinkers. Whisky interests may be better organized than the brewers and interfere more actively in politics, but the votes which make possible the sale of intoxicants are not furnished by whisky drinkers, who do not always vote as they drink. The beer drinker generally will vote to protect his habit, because he is far from convinced of its malignancy.—From Editorial in Chicago Tribune.

And that is why the W. C. T. U. and other temperance organizations are bringing to the masses the truth about beer and its malignant effects upon the human organism. Concerning those effects the Life Extension institute says in a published statement:

"One-half of one quart of beer is sufficient to distinctly impair memory, lower intellectual power and retard simple mental processes, such as the addition of simple figures. This narcotic or deadening influence is first exerted on the higher reasoning powers that control conduct, so that the lower activities of the mind and nervous system are for a time released. The everyday, well-poised, self-controlled man goes to sleep, as it were, and the primitive man temporarily wakes up. Eventually, the nervous system is narcotized, and the drinker becomes sleepy. Muscular efficiency is at first increased a little, and then lowered, the total effect being a loss of working power."

A CORRECTION.

Newspapers and magazines are continually publishing erroneous statements with regard to the number of dry states. A leading weekly periodical publishes a prohibition map showing 17. Iowa is omitted. A writer in one of the June magazines gives the number as 16. Iowa and Idaho both being counted among the wets. Up to September 21, 1914, there were nine prohibition states. Since that time nine more have been added. The 18 prohibition states, in the order of their going dry, are:

Maine	1851
Kansas	1880
North Dakota	1889
Georgia	1907
Oklahoma	1907
North Carolina	1908
Mississippi	1908
Tennessee	1909
West Virginia	1912
Virginia	1914
Colorado	1914
Oregon	1914
Washington	1914
Arizona	1914
Arkansas	1915
Alabama	1915
Idaho	1915
Iowa	1915

PROHIBITION PROGRESS.

(By JAMES MIDDLETON, in World's Work.)

About two years ago Mr. William Jennings Bryan gave a diplomatic dinner in Washington, distinguished particularly by the absence of wine. Immediately the world burst into a roar of laughter; Europeans, especially, hailed the proceeding as an amusing illustration of American provincialism. A few months ago the king of England announced that he would himself abstain from alcoholic drinks for the rest of the war, and that wines would no longer be served in any of the royal households. Nine American states have adopted prohibition in the last eight months. France has legally forbidden the manufacture and sale of absinthe, and the Russian empire is "dryer" at the present moment than Kansas or Maine ever were. Facts like these testify to the progress that the cause of antialcoholism has made in less than a year. When the leader of the most sophisticated society in Europe follows the example of our own somewhat homespun secretary of state, the cause of teetotalism has ceased to be ridiculous.

The special committee appointed by the Socialists a year ago to study the liquor problem says in its report, presented May 13 to the national committee in Chicago that "total abstinence is the only absolutely safe and wise course to pursue" in view of the disastrous effects of excessive drinking.

Many of the authorities quoted in the report in condemnation of beer are German. Among alcohol's recorded opponents are 800 German and Austrian doctors. One statement is that "beer is not the harmless beverage many of the German people think it is."

"The Socialist party," declares the report, "cannot remain indifferent or inactive, but should take a definite position and active part in combating the evils of alcoholism."

ILLINOIS GOING DRY.

Illinois had twenty-eight prohibition counties when the women were asked to assist in destroying the saloon by their votes. They responded by driving them out of twenty-three additional counties at the first election. Four more counties were made dry this year, making a total of fifty-five. Seventy county seats are dry; 1,234 out of 1,430 townships in the state have outlawed the saloon. Not one foot of dry territory has been changed to wet during the two years from May 1, 1913, to May 1, 1914.