

# The..... REFORMER

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## CHAPTER I.



"Dad, how something more to say."

**T**HE great city rose about him like a mountain, with a multitude of umbilical canyons leading off into unexpected distances. The roar of its traffic was persistent and spoke in various voices the language of bitter toll of physical energy and of endless pleasure seeking. At no time in all his life had he seemed so to feel the burden of his responsibility for others as at this moment. He had come to the place where he could no longer endure the strife between duty and inclination, between personal ease and personal ministry to the world that offered him little expectation of reward as he ministered to it. The struggle which had led up to his final precipitation of the crisis had been a struggle almost empty of bitterness, but overflowing with pain. He was conscious as he stood on the steps of his father's house about to turn his back on all the traditions of his father's name and business, that there was no hatred in his soul and no resentment in his heart. What he was about to leave did not find as much place in his mind as what he was about to seek. He was not troubled over any loss to himself, but he faced with a deep seriousness worthy of the certain well defined questions relative to his future. As he finally went down the steps and became a part of the human current that flowed down the street the city seemed to absorb him into its turbulent mysteriousness and to bear him along, a part of its restlessness, a portion of its eternal destiny.

Rufus Gordon looked over at his son. "I don't see that the trip has hurt you any. You look brother, John, than I ever saw you before."

"It has been a great trip for me, father," replied John Gordon, returning his gaze. "I look earnestly, and I am very glad to you for it. The ocean voyage has gone up wonderfully."

"You needed it," The older man said with a heartiness that made the younger to shrink back in his chair as if in anticipation of something different. "I remember the first time I went across I was just about as much run down as you were when you landed at the university six months in Germany and Switzerland made a new man of me. But we've missed you, John—Mary and I."

John Gordon looked out of the window before he answered.

"You are very kind to me. You have always been kind to me. All that makes it hard for me to say something I ought to say."

The father looked sharply at the son, and there was a moment's pause.

"Well, go on," Rufus Gordon said as his son seemed to wait for him to speak.

"In the first place," John Gordon began slowly, "I must refuse your offer of a position in the bank. I cannot by any possibility accept it."

There was another expressive silence between the two men, and Rufus Gordon shut his eyes firmly together, while he hardened gradually.

"I received your letter just before sailing from Liverpool, father," John Gordon continued, "and I believe I appreciate your plan for my future. But it is all impossible. I am going to appear to you in every particular, but that is because you cannot understand."

Rufus Gordon made no movement of any kind, nor even when his son stopped abruptly and stood over at him as if expecting a reply. In the silence that followed he did the upper lip of his son's chin with a sharp, stinging touch. "You have no right to do that," he said. "You have no right to do that."

"Is that your answer to my question? You will not accept the life you have planned for me in your letter?"

It would be worse than a mockery for me to attempt such a career. It would be death to my whole nature. It would cut across every principle of my life, every conviction that has ever prompted me to be of use in the world."

Rufus Gordon finally spoke after his son had been silent a long time.

"We've been over all this more or less before. I hoped your trip abroad would take some of your foolishness out of you. It seems it hasn't. Well, what do you expect to do?"

The question was blunt. It was more—it was brutal.

John Gordon rose and began walking up and down. His father sat looking at him coldly, but curiously, as if studying some peculiar characteristic that for the first time had begun to affect him.

"Further," John Gordon finally exclaimed, "you will never understand my choice. I wondered all the way home whether it was worth while to try to explain myself. But you have a right to know why I refuse your offer, and why I make choice of the career I must follow."

Rufus Gordon gave no sign of assent, but his son went on speaking with growing feeling that at times rose into genuine passion, yet at no point did he lose control of himself either in voice or in manner.

"I am not judging you, father, when I say that a life that is content to expend its greatest energies in money making is a life that has not only no attractions for me, but it has a positive repulsion. To spend the day in a competitive strife that seeks to get more and more largely at the expense of the weak and helpless; to spend night after night in dressing up in fine clothing and being amused, to live only with those select companions who are able to dress and eat as well as we are, to be practically ignorant of and absolutely indifferent to the conditions of thousands of human beings in this great city, to have no ideals higher than a commercial standard and no passions beyond the physical appetites—all this is a growing horror to me. We live in a beautiful house." John Gordon glanced around the room, which was furnished with elegance and great good taste, with only here and there a suggestion of a barbaric lapse into the vulgarity of over display. "We have servants, carriages, yachts, summer residences—luxuries of all descriptions. Out of all the wealth of our lives we give a fraction of income to so called charity. We are all three of us church members. We pay a large sum nominally to church expenses. We do not give anything of our personal lives or personal enthusiasm to church or Christian work. The whole of our family life has revolved about ourselves—our eating, dressing, entertaining and money making. What have we ever done for this city where we live? How much of service presenting real sacrifice have we ever given to help solve any of its real human problems? We live from day to day as if there were no such thing in America as poverty or intemperance or injustice or inequality or greed or child murder. The wealth that buys things seems to be our daily god. The prayers we say in church have no meaning because we do not mean them. The very charity we dispense is an act of proxy which represents no thought, no sacrifice and no human affection. We give because it is customary or as a means of silencing God pity us! our waking consciousness that in spite of us sometimes reminds us that there is a human brotherhood."

"I am going—I am going to God help me, I do not yet know all—but I cannot live this life any longer. What do we do, Mary, but make playtime of life? And the people are beginning to wake up from their sleep of the ages and stretch their limbs with more and more consciousness of power. We shall be playthings to them, if we do not love them and go to work. That is all we shall be fit for—playthings—that is all we have ever done—play—and it is murder to play all the time in a world like ours."

"What's the matter with you, John? What makes you act so? You talk like one of these socialists, these horrid men that are always making so much fuss about rich people and—

"John," he continued with a softening of accent and manner that deepened the son's astonishment, "you cannot do anything. I said I did not understand you or your motives. I know enough, however, to know that if you go out into the world to do the things of which you dream, you will miserably fail, and the result will be pain and disgrace for me, for us all. I love you, John. Perhaps you have not known this. But—"

Rufus Gordon turned and walked back to the place where he had been sitting by the table. When he lifted his face again toward John Gordon, it was the same cold, proud, hard face with which he had listened to his son's indictment of his own and his father's social selfishness.

John Gordon was so confused by this scene and his father's manner that he stood irresolutely silent by the window. The whole incident seemed fantastically unreal; it was so unlike anything his father had ever done before. He had just turned from the window to speak when a voice in the next room began to sing:

"The sadness that grows with the years  
Is a sadness that will not depart;  
It is close to the fountain of tears.  
For it lies at the depth of the heart."

The singer appeared at the doorway and called out in a clear but somewhat hard tone:

"John, will you go with me this evening?"

John Gordon looked grave, and his sister swiftly noted his hesitation.

"What's the matter with you, John?

Since you returned from abroad you get so queer. Don't you want to go with me? Luella is perfectly splendid in the part."

"The play is—" John Gordon hesitated to characterize it. "In reality it was rotten in its whole ethical purpose and teaching."

"Everybody goes," Mary explained pettishly. "Of course if you won't go with me, it will spoil my evening, I had better go alone. It is—"

Rufus Gordon spoke.

"I'll go with you, Mary, if you want me to."

"Oh, will you? That's good, father. She turned toward him, but looked over her shoulder at her brother with a gesture of rejection.

John Gordon looked at the two indifference that registered in his mind what

had practically become the most painful experience of his whole life, the growing knowledge of his estrangement from all his home loves. "But I have chosen," he kept saying to himself. "I have chosen. I cannot go back now." The trifling incident of the theater and his sister's misunderstanding of his attitude toward it was only a single illustration out of a hundred other things that made the whole social career unbearable to him. The fact that this particular play was distinguished by the acting of the most brilliant actor of the age did not relieve the play itself of the condemnation that rested upon it for being too impure and suggestive for any self respecting man or woman to behold its movement on the stage. Yet the wealth and fashion and culture of the city applauded the acting and praised the actor. The press contained columns of commendation for the scenery, the costumes, the spirited presentation from an artistic and dramatic point of view and a mild sentence or two of rebuke for the character of the play itself. What more could one ask by way of allurement to go and see and hear something which was a little doubtful in its moral setting, but splendid in its physical and intellectual sweep of power?

Mary had risen and was going back into the other room singing gayly.

"For it lies at the depth of the heart," when John Gordon spoke again.

"Father, will you wait here a few moments? I wish to have a little talk with Mary. And I would like to finish our conference," he hesitated, but Rufus Gordon answered as he went over to a writing desk, "I'll be here when John Gordon, was going to devote his young manhood to 'the people,' to the training and directing of this misdirected giant, because he smiled at its strange possibility, because he had grown to love it, a love taught him by personal religious experience, so real, so profound, that he knew it dug a gulf as deep as space between his father and his sister and himself. Nothing but a similar experience on their part could ever fill the gulf, nothing but a similar miracle of regeneration could ever make him understood by them.

Mary had gone over to the piano and was humming the tune she had been singing when she interrupted the talk between father and brother. After a moment John Gordon went over and put his hand on his sister's shoulder.

"All through?" she said, turning about from the piano.

There were tears in John Gordon's eyes as he looked down at her. When he spoke, it was very gently.

"It all means, of course, that I am going away. Do you understand that, Mary? This will not be my home any more. It will not be possible for me to live here and do—"

"It's all very strange to me, John," said his sister. "You have every chance in the world and you prefer to throw it away for—for a lot of people who don't care."

"They will care."

"What good if they do, John?" His sister suddenly turned toward him very much as his father had, and laid her hand on his arm. "John, the people will not care. What can you do? Surely we are not to blame for all the wrong in the city. I heard what you said to father. It is simply absurd to think that we are responsible for the things go. And it is nonsense to think you can do anything. Think how it will look in print! John Gordon, the reformer! John Gordon, the socialist!"

"Don't, Mary! It will be hard enough without your sneer."

"I did not mean to sneer." She seemed honestly grieved, and he instantly leaned over and kissed her cheek. But even as he did so he knew she had turned away from him a little, and when he raised his head she did not look up or return his caress. He still stood by her silently, realizing each moment more keenly the chasm that stretched between them owing to his religious experience.

"Where are you going to live? You say you cannot live here with us any more?" his sister finally asked.

"I don't know."

"Will you live with the people?"

"It is possible."

"It is absurd. I don't understand."

"You cannot." He said it with a sadness that realized the futility of explanations.

"And of course Luella will go with you. She is such a lover of the people!"

"Luella."

"You have forgotten her?"

"No!" And yet he had—at least he had absorbed all his thought for the time about his home relations and had not reckoned on facing this question of the relation which would exist between himself and the woman who had promised to be his wife when he had asked her as John Gordon, son of Rufus Gordon. What would she say now to John Gordon, reformer?

He sat down and put his hands over his face, while Mary watched him curiously, very much as the father had done.

"Luella is very proud. Still, she might enjoy living in the slums and studying problems. She is full of contradictions."

"That is true," John Gordon whispered to himself as he lifted up his face.

"Luella thinks a good deal of you, John."

"That is true, too," he whispered to himself again.

"Still, when you think how Luella suddenly exchanged step toward the impassive man who said you loved me. Cannot be in me and the life I have had."

"Nothing more except that you will—no, you will not bear feelings toward me. Oh, father suddenly exchanged step toward the impassive man who said you loved me. Cannot be in me and the life I have had."

"For a moment over the life there swept a tremor. It was a moment and Rufus Gordon slowly:

"You have chosen. When your mind, you may come about it."

"I shall never change my mind."

"That is all, then?"

"Yes, except that my love and Mary is still the same. Next time, when you have test with you will believe in me."

Rufus Gordon made no move. John Gordon slowly turned the room.

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course the reason I don't sh  
feeling is because I cannot be  
are really going to leave us.  
You will try the reforming ha  
little while, and after you have  
that you cannot do anything  
come back and let father work  
plan for you, which, I must say,  
more sensible than what you  
So I don't intend to say good  
and I hope Luella will be as  
you as I am."

She instantly went back to the s  
and began to sing gayly. John Gordon looked at her for a moment, then went into the room and found his father still there. He went up to the door and waited until his father laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Well?" he said as he lifted up his hand to his forehead. "Is something more to say?"

There was not a hint in the man's manner to suggest to John Gordon affection or feeling. He was surprised. But he put out his hand to his father almost like one who is afraid and sees some floating object of reach on a receding way.

"You understand, father, not ask anything of your mother's share of the Waller inheritance due me next year. I will not offend myself until then."

Rufus Gordon did not say anything. John Gordon continued:

"All this—my action is not strange to you, father. Religious experience through passed while abroad makes my course impossible for me. Ask me before, the life we have in this city seems monstrous life for civilized people. The term Christian having at all unless it means sacrifice, sharing in some real need of the world's needs. The do which means simply getting out of the world instead of getting into it. It can be in a civilization not called Christian. My desire to rest, my life cannot be such contradictions torturing me is the reason, father, that our wide and walk together."

The cry was wrung from his sharp and sudden pain that the count of the fact of blood in his veins was the cry of human misery always placed great stress on the importance of companionship. But then the cry from the man who sat at his feet at him. Rufus Gordon was but he was also that person of the net product of our methods—he was crystallized, all the more so as he was more effective in civilizing ignorant self is not so dead educated self.

"Is there anything more?" John Gordon asked the question again proposition to close at that was taking valuable time for more important transaction.

"Nothing more except that you will—no, you will not bear feelings toward me. Oh, father suddenly exchanged step toward the impassive man who said you loved me. Cannot be in me and the life I have had."

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