

The..... REFORMER

By CHARLES M. SHELDON.
Author of "In His Steps," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," etc.

Copyright, 1901, by Charles M. Sheldon



CHAPTER I.



"The time has come for me to say."

The great city rose about him like a mountain, with a multitude of ambitions leading off into unexpected distances. The roar of its traffic was persistent and spoke in various voices the language of bitter toil, of physical energy and of endless pleasure seeking. At no time in all his life had he seemed 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 a 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 occasion 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 brighter, John, than I remember you before."

"It has been a great trip for me, father," answered John Gordon, returning his father's look earnestly, "and I am very glad to see you for it. The ocean voyage was very wonderful."

"You needed it," the older man said with a heartiness that came from 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 finished at the university. Six months in Germany and Switzerland made a new man of me. But we've missed you, John—Mary said."

John Gordon looked out of the window before he answered.

"You've been 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.

"It is 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 a moment's expressive silence between the two men, and Rufus Gordon sat his eyes firmly together, while his face hardened gradually.

"I perceived your offer just before sailing from Liverpool," John Gordon continued, "and I believe I appreciate your plan for my future. But it is all impossible. I am going to the support of my every principle, but that is because you cannot understand."

John Gordon made no movement of any kind, nor even when his son stopped abruptly and looked over at him as if expecting a reply. To one who spent his life as he did, the offer of a position of any kind in the bank would seem to be a thing of no consequence, and he would have readily accepted it, had he been asked to do so.

"Of course I don't expect you to do anything but what you please. But you have brought me up to tell me that I am going to do it now as if I were to do it when I say that I cannot, and will not accept the offer you have made for me. It is your offer."

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 so—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.

"Father," John Gordon finally explained, "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 complete 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 these 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 consciences that in spite of us sometimes remind us that there is a human brotherhood."

"Day after day with monotonous treadmill regularity follows one function after another—receptions, teas, dinners, concerts, parties, self-satisfaction while the city grows up in its political life rotten, the unearned for the money grubbers so long as too much blackmail is not levied on the business in which we are engaged. Practically we have said all these years to this city, where our money has been made, 'We care nothing for you as a living for ourselves, a luxury of living. Let the preachers and the philanthropists and the professional reformers see to all the painful and disagreeable details of human misery and social wrong. We are too busy with our money making to be disturbed by cries for justice or righteousness.' Father, you know this is the sort of life you plan for me to perpetuate. Your ambition for me is to have me enter the bank, to become an expert in finance, to marry and manage a luxurious, proud, exclusive establishment and train my children to follow up in the same path, keeping the name of the Gordons as a social and financial word to speak in the city and in social circles as a synonym for distinguished wealth and high breeding, and which will any vulgar association with common humanity. I say such a career like the will horror. I feel as if all these years I had been living under the domination of an angry God, and I cannot and I will not any longer be ruled by him. You have no right to ask me to do it. I have no right to do it."

"Is that your answer to my question that I asked you what you were going to do?"

"Yes, that is my answer."

"John," he began, holding out his hands, although when the son stepped forward as if to meet him affectionately he dropped his arms quickly to his sides, "you are my only son, and I depend on you. It has been the ambition of my life to see you succeeding in the place which I now occupy. I do not understand what you have just been saying. It has no meaning to me. In that sense, what you say is very true—we can never understand each other. But you would have independence in the position I offer you and for which you have been trained. If you wanted to experiment in those matters of social problems, as you call them, you would have the money and your place in society to help you. But if you step outside the circle in which we belong you will have no standing and no influence. But it is not clear to me yet what your plans are, in case you finally decide to reject my plans for you."

He stopped suddenly, and John Gordon, looking eagerly and with growing astonishment into his father's face, noted for the first time signs of growing age in the deep wrinkles about the eyes, the bent shoulders and a slight but noticeable shaking of one hand as the long white fingers fumbled at the watch chain. He had never before entertained the idea that his father was an old man. Rufus Gordon had always been so upright of carriage, so firm and steady on his feet, so decided in his movements, that none of his acquaintances had yet thought of age in their thought of him. What he now saw had something to do with the manner in which John Gordon answered his father's question.

"My plans, father? I have none—that is, none that you would call by that name. Perhaps as far as I have gone my plans are summed up in my love for the people."

"Love for the people?" Rufus Gordon repeated the words and took a step toward his son. "You love the people, then, more than your old father? For the people you would do what you would not do for me? And who are the people? Masses of the envious, the desperate, the trifling, the irresponsible. Are we to blame for their condition? You talk of social wrongs. But who makes them possible but the people themselves?"

Rufus Gordon had not moved a muscle during his son's talk, and he spoke now in an easy, contemptuous manner. John Gordon came up to the side of the table opposite his father and looked keenly across at him. Then he turned away and went over to one of the great windows and looked out on the fashionable avenue. When he finally turned around and faced his father again, he was astonished to see him rising from his chair and coming over toward him. In all his knowledge of his father, John Gordon had never known him before to exhibit so much feeling. Probably neither man fully understood the event. Afterward, in going over the scene, John Gordon could not avoid a feeling of suspicion as to its genuineness, but he had never known his father to play a part, and, in fact, considered him quite incapable of it.

However that may be, Rufus Gordon now began an appeal to his son that for the time being had considerable influence over him.

"John," he began, holding out his hands, although when the son stepped forward as if to meet him affectionately he dropped his arms quickly to his sides, "you are my only son, and I depend on you. It has been the ambition of my life to see you succeeding in the place which I now occupy. I do not understand what you have just been saying. It has no meaning to me. In that sense, what you say is very true—we can never understand each other. But you would have independence in the position I offer you and for which you have been trained. If you wanted to experiment in those matters of social problems, as you call them, you would have the money and your place in society to help you. But if you step outside the circle in which we belong you will have no standing and no influence. But it is not clear to me yet what your plans are, in case you finally decide to reject my plans for you."

He stopped suddenly, and John Gordon, looking eagerly and with growing astonishment into his father's face, noted for the first time signs of growing age in the deep wrinkles about the eyes, the bent shoulders and a slight but noticeable shaking of one hand as the long white fingers fumbled at the watch chain. He had never before entertained the idea that his father was an old man. Rufus Gordon had always been so upright of carriage, so firm and steady on his feet, so decided in his movements, that none of his acquaintances had yet thought of age in their thought of him. What he now saw had something to do with the manner in which John Gordon answered his father's question.

"My plans, father? I have none—that is, none that you would call by that name. Perhaps as far as I have gone my plans are summed up in my love for the people."

"Love for the people?" Rufus Gordon repeated the words and took a step toward his son. "You love the people, then, more than your old father? For the people you would do what you would not do for me? And who are the people? Masses of the envious, the desperate, the trifling, the irresponsible. Are we to blame for their condition? You talk of social wrongs. But who makes them possible but the people themselves?"

John listened in astonishment. In all their conversation his father had never before spoken so. There was a strain almost of mildness in his manner.

"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? Mr. Fenwick sends word that he cannot go owing to a sudden summons out of town."

"What is it, Mary?" John Gordon spoke affectionately.

"Invited to the Edge of the Sword," 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? Invited is perfectly splendid in the part."

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

"Everybody goes," Mary exclaimed petulantly. "Of course, if you won't go with me, it will spoil my evening. I had been expecting it."

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

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 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 social setting, but splendid in its physical and intellectual sweep of power?

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

"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 you are through." He sat down and began to write, while John and Mary went together into the next room.

"Mary, I want to talk seriously with you," John Gordon began as Mary commenced to sing in a mocking tone.

"The sadness that grows with the years—"

"No! No! Listen to me once, just this once, Mary, with seriousness. You know we have played together and lightly treated the world all these years. But it cannot go on forever. I have come to a place, Mary, where I must choose between father and you and the work of my life. It is no playing matter now."

"Why, what are you going to do?"

It was the same question his father had asked and it presented again the same mental difficulty to John Gordon. If his father failed to understand his son's motives, his sister was, if anything, far less capable of knowing what her brother had in mind.

"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, will you go with me this evening?"

"That's all," Mary spoke with a touch of petulance as her excitement or anger as she generally became under strong temptation.

"I am one, Mary," replied John Gordon quietly.

"What! A socialist? You! John Gordon?" The girl spoke in genuine astonishment. And with a gesture of real fear she moved away and stood looking at him as if seeing something new and strange in him.

"You don't need to be afraid of me, Mary," John said with a slight smile. "I can't explain it all to you. But all my views have changed within the last few months. It is not possible for me to continue the business that father has built up. He has been so deeply set upon it that I know my refusal to make his plans my own has angered him beyond forgiveness. You know father will enough to know that I cannot expect anything from him in the way of encouragement in the career I have planned."

"Why, you have not told me at all what you plan to do!" exclaimed his sister hopefully.

"I am going to work for the people, I am going to—"

"You'll ruin me!" There it was; ignorant, some of it, but hourly rising into a desperate intelligence, which, undirected, would prove its own and the city's destruction. "The people," tolling, sweating, acting figures in the great human drama that were neither superhuman nor leading parts, but so vital to the whole movement of the tragedy that it all was destined to sweep on to its final act, with them as resultant cause! "The people," vague, but certain, full of unwritten histories, and bearing in face and attitude the wear or woe of republics! "The people," driven in herds one day, leading the masses the next, while all problems of life surged up and down the thronging highways, entanglements caused by murderous greed, by inherited customs, by the physical passions that know no education of refinement due to civilization! "The people," born of the soil, but molded by the city, some of it to starve and riot and drink and grow indifferent to the very wrongs that made it what it was, and he, John Gordon, the son of Rufus Gordon, the great financier, the man of "deals" and "combos" and "operations"—and he, 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 his 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 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 way 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, realising 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!"

"Luella!"

Sick

Headaches, Dizzy Spells, Weak, Nervous, Wretched, Tired

Until Dr. Miles' Nervine Cured Me.

Are you in a "poor condition" almost ready to give up from nervousness, headaches, backaches, dizzy spells? No need to mention the tails of a run down or "poor condition" those who are suffering. Better to get of Nervine, the remedy sold on a guarantee to help you, and restore your poor nerves to life, strength and health.

"Dr. Miles' Restorative Nervine has done a great deal for me. In the fall of the health was in a very poor condition, nervousness, headaches, backaches, dizzy spells? No need to mention the tails of a run down or "poor condition" those who are suffering. Better to get of Nervine, the remedy sold on a guarantee to help you, and restore your poor nerves to life, strength and health.

All druggists sell and guarantee Dr. Miles' Remedies. Send for Dr. Miles Medical Co., Elkhart, Ind.

course the reason I don't show feeling is because I cannot believe you are really going to leave me for little while, and after you have that you cannot do anything to come back and let father work out a plan for you, which, I must say, more sensible than what you are doing. So I don't intend to say goodbye, and I hope Luella will be as good as you as I am."

She instantly went back to the piano and began to sing softly. John Gordon looked at a moment, then went into the room and found his father still there. He went up to the door, waited until his father laid down the pen.

"Well?" he said as he lifted and looked up at his son. "Is something more to say?"

There was not a hint in the manner to suggest to John Gordon affection or feeling. He was surprised. He had not expected that he put out his hand toward father almost like one who is about to see some floating object of reach on a receding way.

"You understand, father, I do not ask anything of you, mother's share of the Wallace due me next year. I will take myself until then."

Rufus Gordon did not speak. "All this—my action is mild, will be strange to you, father. My religious experience through my passed while abroad makes my course impossible for me. As you know, the life we have been living in this city seems now monstrous life for civilized people. The term Christian has been living at all unless it means sacrifice, sharing in some real sense of the world's needs. The term which means simply getting all out of the world instead of putting it can into it is a civilization that cannot be called Christian. Myself not to rest, my life cannot pass such contradictions turning to the reason, father, that our divide. Would to God that we could walk together!"

The cry was wrung from him sharp and sudden pain that count of the fact of blood that was the cry of human failure, exclamation of a personality that always placed great stress on companionship. But there cry from the man who sat looking at him. Rufus Gordon was but he was also that person of the net product of our methods—his was crystallized, all the more selfish, was more effective in creating ignorant self is not so well educated self.

"Is there anything more?" Gordon asked the question in a way that was taking valuable time for more important transactions.

"Nothing more except that you will—you will not bear feelings toward me. Oh, father, Gordon suddenly exclaimed, stop toward the impassive man said you loved me. Cannot you in me and the life I have chosen. For a moment over the there swept a tremor. It was a moment and Rufus Gordon played.

"You have chosen. When you say that, you may consider about it."

"I shall never change my mind."

"That is all, then?"

"Yes, except that my son and Mary is still the same time, when you have felt what you will believe as I do."

Rufus Gordon made no more. John Gordon slowly turned to the room.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT PAGE