The Reformer

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

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Gordon offered to see her to the train, but she firmly refused to be of any trouble to any one. "I am able to go alone. A carriage is waiting for me. Good night, sir, and God be with you."

"Good night, madam," replied Gordon. Williams appeared and opened the door. Gordon insisted on seeing her down the steps and into the carriage. He had shut the door and the driver had just started his horse when the old lady stopped the driver with a word, her fine sharp cut face looking out of the window.

"Tell your friend I will write. It will not be long before we shall meet."

The carriage went on, and Gordon walked up the steps and into the hall with a feeling that he had been dream-

"Who are you?"

ing. But the perfume of a cedar chest just opened after a long sea voyage lingered in the hall and followed him into the rooms as he thoughtfully went in again and took a look at Barton before resting.

In the morning when Gordon came out of his room he found Barton up and whistling.

He noticed his friend's apparently improved condition.

"You had a caller last night after you fell asleep."

"That so? Some one from the office?" Barton asked carelessly.

"An old lady off an East Indiaman dated 1785."

"I'm too tired to guess. Explain."

"Here is her card." Gordon handed it to Barton.

"Mrs. Captain George Effingham, Salem," Barton read. Then his cheeks showed a color in addition to the unnatural glow there.

Gordon went up and put a hand on his arm.

"David, I know now why—why"—

"Say, you aren't going to cry, are you?"

"Cry! I've been crying all night. To think that you"—

"Well, why shouldn't I enjoy trips to Colorado, even if I can't personally conduct them? Tell me about the old lady. Effingham said his grandmother was going on a hundred. Sorry I missed seeing her. I expect she is a picture."

"A picture! She is a romance. You would have fallen in love with her at once. She brought into the room the fragrance of cinnamon and cloves and spice from the islands of the sea. Don't you detect it now?"

"Smells to me like Williams' coffee," replied Barton, sniffing critically. "But tell me about her."

Gordon described the visit as vividly as possible. When he had finished, there was a suspicion of moisture in Barton's eyes.

"She wanted me to tell you she would write."

"First love letter I'll ever get," sighed Barton whimsically. "I expect she's rich."

"No doubt. I can imagine the square old fashioned house she owns in Salem—colonial front, fan window arrangement over the doors and a staircase big enough to drive up a double team. But, oh, David, why did you not go out there yourself before"—

"Before it was too late? No good. Case is chronic. Let's change the subject. Tell me about Mr. Marsh."

"But how many persons are you supporting in Colorado?"

"Don't remember. Quit it or you will bring on my cough. It always gets me when inconsiderate friends insist on talking about it."

So Gordon took up the day's experience with Mr. Marsh while Williams brought in the coffee and rolls, and Barton seemed unusually cheerful and funny. When Gordon rose to go, Barton said:

"I think maybe I'll get down to the office next week. But come up as often as you can, old man, won't you?"

Gordon promised, with a choking in his throat as he shook hands, and went off, carrying with him a memory that was both sad and inspiring. After he had gone out David Barton went over to the couch and, kneeling down, sobbed like a child. He was a gifted man, only forty years old, and life was very sweet to him.

The first thing John Gordon did on reaching Hope House was to confer with Miss Andrews.

"Do you think Mr. Marsh will do anything?" she asked.

"I think so—yes." But Gordon's reply was not very strong.

"You are in doubt. He was deeply impressed. But, if I mistake not, he is the kind of man to delay any move that means a real financial loss. His horror of the tenement conditions is not equal to his dread of ultimate money loss if he tears the double decker down or remodels it."

"I'm afraid—yes," Gordon answered, with a sigh.

"But of course," he said after awhile, "you have used your influence with the board of health and the city officials and all other departments."

"Yes," Miss Andrews answered quietly.

"But conditions are getting worse. Why?"

"Ask Tommy Randall."

"The political boss?"

"Of course you know he is the rock on which most of our reforms split."

"I have never met him. Of course you have been to him personally?"

"Often. He's the most dangerous man in the city. He is utterly devoid of conscience. I have never found a single quality in him to which I could appeal. But, if he would, he could move the powers that be to right nearly every wrong in the ward."

Gordon was on the point of going on with the inquiries, for what he had heard of Tommy Randall, the boss, surrounded that potent force with a certain human fascination, but Miss Andrews was called away, and the talk was not renewed until they met again at dinner.

For a week John Gordon continued his special investigation with Ford, the university student. The work took him into another block. Coming back one evening from the district, he passed by No. 91, and the sight of an unusual commotion there caused him to stop and go in. He thought of his little friend, Louie, and reproached himself for not having gone to see him or make inquiries. But the child was only one of hundreds for whom his heart was beginning to bleed as the unending agony of childhood's tragedy in the tenements was beginning to be unfolded to him.

He went into the court and up the staircase and out upon the corridor. Several women there seemed agitated by some recent occurrences.

"What is it?" he asked of one of the women, who was crying into a dirty apron.

"Louie's dead," she replied and resumed her crying.

John Gordon stepped to the door leading into Mrs. Caylor's. The mother met him there. Her face was hard and tearless.

"May I go in?" Gordon asked gently.

The woman made no reply, and Gordon went on. The rooms were lighted with candles. Several women were in the room. A man was standing by a table on which was a rough pine coffin, at which he was looking with disgust or contempt.

He looked up as Gordon came in.

"Who are you?" was the man's rough greeting.

"My name is John Gordon of Hope House."

The man turned suddenly to one of the women who stood looking on submissively. "Take the thing out," pointing to the coffin, "and tell Abrams to send up something better or he'll hear from me."

And this was John Gordon's introduction to Tommy Randall, the political boss of Hope House district, Ward 18.

CHAPTER VI.

Falmouth stood up and began to talk.

GORDON went back to the doorway, where Mrs. Caylor was standing. She was tearless and apparently stolid.

"What arrangements have been made for a service, Mrs. Caylor?" Gordon asked, and his heart was sore at the sight of the wretched mother, whose tearless attitude touched him more than if she had shown a passion of grief.

"Mr. Randall is seeing to it," she said indifferently.

"But don't you want a minister?" Gordon was bewildered. He had never faced exactly the same situation.

"I don't care. Mr. Randall"—

"You are not a Catholic? I remember you said to me your people in New England belonged to the Baptist church. There ought to be a service of some kind, with a minister. Do you know one you would like to have?"

"A minister!" The woman turned on him almost fiercely. "A minister! Mighty little use they have for such a one as me! This is no man's parish!"

"But for the sake of Louie! I can get Mr. Falmouth to come down. I am so sorry for you, Mrs. Caylor. God help you! Louie was a good boy."

The woman suddenly threw her apron over her head and burst into a torrent of weeping so violent that at first Gordon was alarmed. He brought her a chair and made her sit down. The other women in the corridor came up, and one of them said: "She'll be all right now. When you can't cry, that's the time your heart bleeds inside."

"What's all this racket?" cried a voice from the room. Gordon wheeled about and faced the man, Tommy Randall. With the instinctive forewarning of a peculiarly sensitive and delicate moral consciousness Gordon knew that between this man and himself there could be nothing but war from the start. But what form it would take, what forces the man had to draw on, how much of a hold he had on the wretched lives that furnished his field of action, John Gordon did not know. Perhaps it was as well that he did not know much about it. A full knowledge of even one aspect of Tommy Randall's political influence might have appalled a more courageous and hopeful man than John Gordon.

The boss was a man of about forty-five. Outwardly he was a short, thickset man, with a florid face and a resolute manner. He did not show any signs of intemperate living, and indeed it was his boast that he had no vices. The most noticeable characteristic of the man was his absolute confidence in his own influence. It was not egotism so much as a thorough faith in the political security of his position.

There was one quality that John Gordon possessed, however, that made him formidable. He was fifteen years younger than this man, and he had practically no experience in that world which was the only world in existence for Tommy Randall. But he had a faith in God that was as profound as the other man's political creed, and in his love for the people he was prepared in acting on that creed to go any lengths that were within human possibility. If Gordon was ignorant of Tommy Randall's strength, the boss was no less ignorant of this young man's inner sources of persistent and tireless strength that would inevitably come to his assistance in the struggle that was beginning in that wretched tenement, with a child's death as witness to the grim contest.

"I have been asking Mrs. Caylor what arrangements have been made for a funeral service." Gordon spoke quietly. "If no other minister has been engaged, I think I can get Mr. Falmouth of Nazareth church to come down."

Tommy Randall walked up to John Gordon and deliberately looked him over. Gordon stood perfectly still and never moved a muscle as his eyes looked straight into the older man's.

"The service has all been arranged, young man," Randall said finally. A sound of shuffling steps was heard on the broken stairs and along the corridor, and two men appeared with a coffin.

"Ah! There you are, Abrams! That's more like it. Don't try to palm off another one of your rotten boxes on me or you'll hear from me, eh? Put it on the table." Then, as two children came into the room at the heels of the two men who brought the coffin, Gordon was astonished to see Randall pat them on the head kindly and say: "Now, then, lads, out of the road. I can't stop now."

The children went out of the room, and Randall bustled in and out, ordering chairs and helping place the body of Louie in the coffin. Gordon came up to the table to look at the little face, for Louie had been partly deformed, and his face was like a baby's.

He looked down at the figure and noticed that one hand was clinched tight. Stooping a little lower, by the dim light Gordon recognized his own little gift when he had gone in with Mr. Marsh. It was a sample bottle of perfumery, and the child had clung to it in the darkness, dying in the horrible filth of his surroundings, and, as Gordon learned some time afterward, literally covered with vermin.

John Gordon's tears fell on the face as he felt that here was one of God's little ones against whom somebody had sinned. "Better for a millstone to be hanged around his neck"—he seemed to hear the words of the Son of Man—"than that one of these little ones should perish." Who was to blame? Was it the social system? Was it the selfish wealth? Was it political dishonesty? Was it a definite individual? This child—weak, deformed, helpless—did it not need the strength and beauty of a whole universe thrown about it in loving protection? Instead of that, flung like some vile thing among the rotting, loathsome, crawling things of the lowest physical world, it had gone out of a world of black horrors, clinging childishly to a bit of artificial fragrance that was practically all the touch it ever knew of the abounding perfume of a flower bedecked earth. Poor little soul! Will not God take him and hold him long in his bosom of infinite pity? And will it be unjust if an impassable gulf yawns between him and the Dives who on earth tasted all the physical delights, but let the dogs lick the sores of the beggar at his gate, proud of his charity in flinging to him the crumbs of the feast? For is not that about all that wealthy Christendom has so far flung at the dying beggar of the slum, after 2,000 years of luxurious civilization?

"Now then, young man, is there anything more?"

His profound reverie was suddenly interrupted by Randall.

"The service?"

"The service! I will see to that."

"Is there any minister?" Gordon asked firmly, for he knew enough from what he had heard from the residents to know that in many cases there were no religious services of any kind and a horrible haste and tumult that partook of the savagery of brute nature.

Tommy Randall paused before he answered, weighing somewhat carefully just how far he could go.

"What business is it of yours, young fellow?"

Gordon silently showed him his inspector's badge.

"Umph! Board of health! Does the honorable body authorize you to manage funerals?"

"It does," replied Gordon boldly.

"How's that?" Randall asked sharply.

"The duties of tenement inspectors," Gordon went on calmly, "are clearly defined in section 12, article 4, of the regulations of the state board of health. That article distinctly says it shall be the duty of the inspectors, in case of death occurring in districts under inspection, to notify the proper authorities and, if no other authorized body is in charge, to arrange whatever is necessary for the welfare of the family in the matter of burial, etc. I consider, therefore, that I am acting fully within the limits of my authority when I say I have a right to call in a minister for the decent observance of the rites attending this death."

Tommy Randall was silent a moment. He was preparing a speech that would show this young man what a mistake he had made when Gordon suddenly asked, with the simplicity that came from part ignorance of the power the boss really had:

"By what authority are you here in charge of this funeral?"

Tommy Randall gasped. For the first time in years he grew pale with rage, and at first Gordon thought the man was going to strike him.

"By what authority, you insolent puppy? I'll teach you by what authority! This is my ward. I'll have you understand—my ward, do you hear?"

"I hear you quite well, sir. You do not need to talk to make the dead hear!"

John Gordon spoke with a heart on fire as he realized with a gleam of instinctive loathing of the man his diabolical hold on the people. "Come out here and say what you have to say. It is not decent for us to be having all this in the room."

He turned in a great heat of anger that instantly cooled as he went out in the corridor, and Randall followed him, in spite of himself as it seemed, and the curious, gaping crowd, mostly women, thronged around to see the row between Tommy Randall, the autocrat of Ward 18, and the slim, pale faced, well dressed "gent" who had suddenly stepped into the arena alone against the whole political machine.

"He's up against it!" chuckled an old woman.

"Tommy will do him up brown," said a young man who loafed against the broken railing of the corridor and spit tobacco juice down on the heads of the children in the court below.

Gordon again was the first to speak. He was not aggressive, but perfectly firm and calm.

"Have you any legal authority for managing affairs here?" he asked, and Randall again made a movement which looked like a threat of physical violence.

"It is none of your business!" The sentence came out with an explosion of profanity that delighted the crowd.

"I am regularly appointed by the board of health as a legal officer. Do I understand that you are an officer of the city? Do you have a legal, official authority in these premises?" Gordon asked calmly. The question was so simply put that its very simplicity staggered Tommy Randall. He stared and then broke into a coarse laugh that was echoed by the women.

"Official duty be ——. I run this ward. I'm in charge here, and I warn you to get out and leave this business to me."

"Do I understand you to threaten an officer with violence?" Gordon asked, looking him in the eye coldly. At the same time he took out a notebook, while Randall eyed him in a rage that he was trying evidently to choke down. For the first time also a trace of uneasiness mingled with his astonishment at the unexpected boldness of the young man who had thrown down the gauntlet before the boss of Ward 18. He was beginning to be in doubt concerning the young man's political pull. Nothing short of secret influence at the city hall could account for his astounding attitude.

"I warn you," Gordon talked as he jotted down something in the book and put it back into his pocket, "that I am acting fully within my authority as an officer specially detailed for this duty. I understand you make no claim to being an officer of the city. I shall proceed to secure a minister and have the services properly conducted. Mrs. Caylor is willing to have it done. Aren't you, Mrs. Caylor?"

"I don't care! Louie was a good boy; he was a good boy!" she cried, throwing her apron over her head and rocking back and forth with great sobs. During the talk she had been sitting by the door, apparently oblivious to everything. She now suddenly rose up and staggered into the room, throwing her arms over the coffin and shrieking aloud: "He was a good boy! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Tommy Randall turned toward John Gordon with a look that was simply Satanic.

"If you attempt to interfere or make any unusual disturbance, Mr. Randall," Gordon said again as he had twice before, taking the initiative, "I shall report you to the authorities."

The statement was so simply made, it covered so much absolute authority, that for a moment Tommy Randall stared in silence, too much astonished to say a word. Then, to Gordon's surprise and to the bewilderment of the crowd, the older man put out his hand and said, with a laugh:

"You're a good one! Report Tommy Randall! Give me your hand on it, young fellow! But you have the— Say wouldn't he make a team with another one like him?"

Again the crowd laughed coarsely, and Gordon, without seeming to notice the outstretched hand, turned his back on all of them and went into the room. Randall watched him, with a snarl on his face that prophesied any number of accounts for the future. Then he grew thoughtful, and before any one could guess his next movement he followed Gordon into the room.

Gordon had even in that brief time begun to soothe the distracted mother.

"I'll get my friend Mr. Falmouth to come down. He will have a beautiful service. He will"—

"Does Mr. Randall"—

The words were spoken with a frightened air that Gordon saw at once had some good reason. But before he could answer Randall said good naturedly:

"I think we had better have the minister come down, Mrs. Caylor. That's all right."

"I'll arrange it," Gordon said briefly, as if Randall were not present. He did not care to puzzle himself at present over the man's change of manner. That it was a part of his regular policy to gain an end he knew well enough, but he was indifferent to it. His very indifference was so complete that the boss felt again that uneasiness that had come to him already as a new experience, and again that same diabolical hate included John Gordon in its sweep of future reckoning, for Tommy Randall was beginning to feel dimly, but really, that for the first time in his political career he was in the presence of a new factor. The newness of it puzzled and enraged him. It was so unknown that he could not figure on it. That made it doubly hateful to him.

John Gordon stayed a little longer and then went away. The hour fixed for the service was 3 o'clock. As he went out into the corridor and groped his way down the stairs and out into the court he was plainly aware that curious faces stared at him, and a little added respect was paid him.

"The old man fell down!" muttered the woman who had foretold Gordon's humiliation at the hands of the boss.

"Naw he didn't!" the tobacco user ejaculated, with an oath. "Wait till the old man gets in his upper cut. He ain't downed by no 'gent!'"

Gordon at once took a car for Nazareth avenue, and within an hour he was in the Rev. Paul Falmouth's study, which was in the rear of Nazareth Avenue church.

"Glad to see you, Gordon," Falmouth said as he rose and greeted his visitor cordially. The minister was a grave faced man of thirty-five. The books, papers, pictures and articles of interest in his study proclaimed a student if not a scholar. The man himself had a reserve power. How much more than that was not apparent at first sight.

"I'm sorry to disturb your morning, Mr. Falmouth. I know your rule, but this is a case of death. I knew you would listen to me."

"Certainly; go on. I was thinking of you just a minute ago and planning to come down to Hope House and see you. Of course I know what you have done. The papers"—

"Thank you, Mr. Falmouth, for your kind letter. It did me good. I'll be glad to see you at Hope House. But I know how busy you are!" Gordon glanced at the minister's desk, which was covered with open books, manuscripts in various degrees of preparation and a miscellaneous heap of correspondence which told the particular story of a laborious life.

"I'm always busy, Gordon." The words were spoken with a sigh that was instantly repressed. "But for more reasons than one I want to see you and have a good long talk with you."

"I'll be very glad. But this is my errand this morning. I want you for a funeral service this afternoon."

He went on rapidly to relate the brief story of Louie, without reference to Randall or any of the occurrences that had brought him into the tragedy.

"I'll go, of course," Falmouth said instantly when Gordon paused. "Shall we have any singing? Have you any one in Hope House?"

"I had an idea as I came along up," Gordon spoke with a little hesitation. "If this was a funeral on Park boulevard for a rich man's son and you were called on to officiate, who would probably sing?"

"Why, the Nazareth Avenue quartet, I suppose. That is the arrangement made with them by the church music committee—that I am to have their services whenever I conduct a funeral. But"—

The Rev. Paul Falmouth paused. He saw at once the bearing of Gordon's question. Gordon watched him closely.

"Why not?" the minister said.

He rose and went into an adjoining room and rang a telephone bell. Gordon could hear him talking. When he came out, he said simply:

"The quartet will join me here at 2, and we will go down together. I don't think any of them have been down on Bowen street. But, for that matter, neither have I. It won't hurt us any to see it."

"I don't know about that, sir. I'm of the opinion that it will hurt you. But isn't it about time that somebody besides the people around Hope House was hurt by what is going on there?"

The minister was silent. He understood fully all that Gordon implied by his remark. When he lifted his head, Gordon had risen to go.

"Don't go, Gordon—that is, unless you have to. Why can't we have that talk now as well as any time?"

"We can unless you are too"—

"Busy? But it can wait. There's an article for the Homiletic Review; there's another for the North Ameri-

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"Glad to see you, Gordo

can; there are two sermons before the convention of izenship and a list of that is never caught up question if any or all of it tant as some of the things discuss with you."

He paused, and his grave ed up with a gleam of transformed his scholarly into something quite different sat down again.

"What do you think of Gordon? How much is it all?"

The question surprised Gordon.

"I'm not a judge and don't be. I neglected my duties to and I am the last man in criticise it."

Falmouth sat silent awhile.

"The church in this city its duty," he said at last. "I question how much it is really Christ's commands. When the wealth and business talent and culture in my ual church alone, I cannot myself how much of it is crated to the uses of the not know six men in my gation who accept the doctrine ownership of property, taught in the Bible and When I preach on the subject ple listen in a half amused if I were a theorist giving that will not work in the ness world. There are not ple in my whole parish tenth of their income to work of the world."

"How large is your church asked. He was growing interested in Falmouth's for the minister had talked alone.

"We have 976 names on roll. There are seventy-two Over 900 resident members

twenty-five men in the over $50,000, if their return assessor are true. We church, missionary and bene poses, including my salary, $2,500, the sum of $13,000 We pay a quartet choir We pay an organist $900. committee paid $1,700 last flowers and decorations in At least a dozen women spent $500 apiece on flower rations in the church. dozen women in the church apiece on flowers and their homes for receptions and gave less than $10 missions. This sounds and gossipy string of But I am reminded of an one of Starr King's essays

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT