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The.....
REFORMER

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

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CHAPTER I.

"You have something new to say?"

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.

"Father," 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 language.

"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-decor.

"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, theaters, concerts, gayeties, self, self, self—while the city grows up in its political life, rotten, vile, uncleaned for by the money grabbers so long as too much blackmail is not levied on the business in which we are engaged. Practically we have sold all these years to this city, where our money has been made. We care nothing for your real life. All that we want out of you is a living for ourselves, a luxurious 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 crisis for justice or righteous work. 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 raise my children to follow on in the same path, keeping the name of the Gordons as a social and financial word to speak in the city and in select circles as a synonym for distinguished wealth and high breeding, unmingled with any vulgar association with common humanity. I say such a career fills me with horror. I feel as if all these years I had been living under the condemnation of an angry god, and I cannot and I will not any longer live such a life. You have no right to ask me to do it. I have no right to attempt it."

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

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KICKED BY A HORSE

AND SUFFERED NEARLY FORTY YEARS BEFORE THE BONE HEALED



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

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

"Just what you needed." The older man spoke with a heartiness that seemed to cause the younger to shrink back a little 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 and I."

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.

"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 his face 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 disappoint you in every particular, but that is because you cannot understand."

Rufus Gordon made no movement of any kind, not even when his son stopped abruptly and looked over at him as if expecting a reply. To one who knew him as his son did the utter absence of any sign of emotion in the face of what was in reality a tremendous blow at his family pride indicated simply the hard, unyielding nature of the man.

"Of course I don't expect you to understand—I anticipate nothing. But you have brought me up to feel the truth, and I am simply telling it now as it must be told, when I say that I cannot and will not accept the life you mapped out for me in your letter."

"AM I ALL RIGHT? OF COURSE I'M ALL RIGHT," SAID MR. A. COOPER, OF POLK COUNTY, WHEN ASKED ABOUT HIS LEG WHICH WAS HURT WHEN HE WAS A BOY. "I WAS KICKED BELOW THE KNEE BY A HORSE IN 1860 WHEN A MERE BOY, AND SUFFERED FOR YEARS. IT ACHED TERRIBLY AND SOON BROKE; THEN PIECES OF BONE COMMENCED COMING OUT AND CONTINUED FOR ABOUT A YEAR. THIS WAS FOLLOWED

September 1st, 1902.

PERSONS WISHING TO KNOW MORE OF MR. COOPER'S CASE CAN LEARN ALL THE PARTICULARS BY CALLING ON HIM AT INDEPENDENCE, OREGON, OR AT DR. COOK'S OFFICE, 103 LIBERTY STREET, SALEM, OREGON.

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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 these 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 thriftless, 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 madness 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 knew 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.

"Ravell in '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 act so queer. Don't you want to go with me? Ravell 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 exclaimed petulantly. "Of course, if you won't go with me, it will spoil my evening. I had been expecting it so."

Rufus Gordon spoke.

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

"Oh, will you? That's a 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 in silence 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 gaily.

"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, 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 you 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 herd men that are always making so much fuss about rich people and—"



"John, will you go with me this evening?" all that? Mary spoke with a look of perturbation as near excitement 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 great astonishment. And with a gesture of real fear she moved away and was 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 my views have changed within the few months. It is not possible for me to continue the business that has built up. He has been so dependent upon it that I know his answer will make his plans my own has answered him beyond forgiveness. You know father well enough to know that I do not 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 the sister hopelessly.

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

John Gordon paused as a vision of his future, mistlike, but in rugged outline, grew on the screen of his imagination.