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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 III.



At last John Gordon spoke slowly. "David, do you know how much you have tempted me?"

"For your good."

"I'm not so sure. The offer is full of possibilities. Still—"

"Well, don't keep anything back."

"The News itself—you know my ideas about it. The paper is full of sensation; it is unreliable; it is not journalism that any thoughtful man respects."

"What difference does that make if you have your own page to do with it as you like?"

Barton spoke with apparent indifference concerning his friend's estimate of journalism, as if he either acknowledged the truth of Gordon's statement or did not care to argue it.

"Of course it makes a good deal of difference. Do you think Harris is sincere in his reform movements? Is he using the paper to help the people or is he simply taking up popular causes because he is shrewd enough to see that it is good policy for the News?"

Barton looked at John Gordon quizzically.

"Do you know Harris?"

"I've seen him, but I don't know him."

"Neither do I. He's put \$200,000 into the News, and the paper has made at least half that in the time it has been going. He's proud as Lucifer and has Lucifer's ambition. He's willing to do anything except get into jail for the paper, and he'd probably do that if it would increase the circulation. But what difference does it make to you, John, so long as you have full swing in your own department?"

"I don't know that my work will really be helped by going into print. To tell the honest truth, I have a contempt for his journalistic methods. Now look here."

John Gordon picked up from the table a copy of the News and began reading some of the headlines.

"Microbes in Car Straps! Menace to Traveling Public! Danger Explained by Professor Reitzger of the University!"

"The Richest Woman in the World! Her Daily Routine! Over \$500,000 Worth of Gems in Her Hair at the Court Ball!"

"The Cost of One Day's Sneeze For Two Fourteenth Street Bloods! Itemized Account!"

"Mrs. Brown Calls Mrs. Jones a Liar! They Have a Scruppy Time of It in the Back Yard! The Neighbors Take a Hand!"

"Theological Set-to at the University! Professors Do Not Agree on Figures! Our Teachers That Adam Never Existed!"

"The Newest Fad! Society's Craze For Egyptian Mummies! The Latest Developments!"

"The Tallest Woman in America! Her Diet, Daily Habits, etc."

"Riotousness at the City Hall! A Full Exposure of Dr. Lumme's Extravagance! Policemen Murphby Scores a Hit at Alderman Schwartz! Turn on the Light!"

"Thoroughbred Toy Dogs! An Expensive Luxury! Mrs. Neac Has a Choice Collection!"

"Ghostly Suicide of an Old Sailor! Purposely Jumped into a Vat of Boiling Acid! Full Particulars!"

"War! The Sultan Is Growing More Defiant! Orders Out Rosporus Fleet!"

"The Sandal Craze! Boots and Shoes a Back Number Soon! Pictures of Latest Styles!"

Gordon threw the paper down, and Barton laughed cynically.

"What's the matter with it? At any rate, they keep buying it. Whoever sees an Index or a Standard around Hope House? There you are! If you want to reach the people, do it through the medium that the people use. Think of over 3,000,000 readers of the News every day."

"Yes, think of it!" exclaimed John Gordon. "Think of the stuff they read that is untruth and exaggeration and hysteria about matters that are of no value. A column to 'Toy Dogs' kept by a rich woman who spends enough

money on them to save the lives of a hundred babies! It is this sort of thing that makes anarchists and criminals. All Harris wants out of a reform page is to advertise the paper. I'm almost sure of it."

"Probably," said Barton dryly. "At the same time you can be getting in your reform work through a paper that is read by the very people you want to help."

"But it is not read nor believed in by the very people who have it in their power to help the people, David, the best people in the city don't care for the News. They laugh at its editorials and don't care for its influence. It really has no influence with them."

For the first time David Barton seemed disturbed. The frank criticism of his friend concerning the News in respect to its printed matter had not moved him. But this last statement touched a tender spot. Barton's pale cheeks flushed, and he struck the table with his clenched fist.

"Better not tell Harris that! He has an idea that his paper runs the town. He thinks his editorials make public sentiment."

"He's wrong!" John Gordon spoke decidedly. "His editorials have no such power. They are rated along with the rest of the paper. The fact is the yellow journalism works out its own destruction inevitably. Its days are already numbered."

"Our circulation is increasing."

"All the bigger fall when it comes," replied John Gordon briefly, and then they were both startled by a voice from the doorway of the room adjoining.

"Beg pardon, Barton, I couldn't make you hear, though I knocked twice."

Barton turned his head as a man came into the room and exclaimed, "Mr. Harris!" at the same time sending a questioning flash to Gordon, "Wonder how much he heard?"

Harris walked up to the table and coolly helped himself to a cigar from a little Chinese pot and lighted it at the cigar jet.

"Mr. John Gordon, Mr. Harris," said Barton, who had fully recovered his usual indifferent attitude by this time.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Gordon," said Harris, putting out a very long white hand. John Gordon took it, although instantly he felt a most intense dislike for the man.

He was of a thin, wiry physique, smooth faced, a bloodless complexion, straight lips and cold gray eyes. His manner was perfectly self possessed, and neither Gordon nor Barton could detect any sign on his face that he had overheard a syllable of their talk before he entered. He was faultlessly dressed and had the general appearance of a man who has exhausted a large part of his interest in life on account of a large number of intense experiences. At the same time there was a serious alertness about him that was very noticeable. He was not blase in the ordinary use of that word. He evidently had boundless faith in himself. John Gordon had no difficulty in telling why the man produced such a dislike in him. It was because of his absolute egotism.

"Mr. Gordon is my friend; the one I mentioned to you the other day as a possible contributor in a new department," Barton said as Harris still remained standing near the table.

Harris looked at Gordon and said carelessly:

"I understand you are going to experiment down in the slums around Bowen street."

"I may live there. I don't know about experimenting," said John Gordon coolly. He was rapidly beginning to have Miss Andrews' dislike of the word "slums" as he had already grown to have a hatred of the idea of "experimenting" with the people.

Harris walked over to a chair at the other end of the table, and after a silence which neither Barton nor Gordon seemed inclined to break he said, leaning a little forward and speaking with careful emphasis:

"Mr. Gordon, I am prepared to make you a proposition that I hope you will at least thoughtfully consider. The News now has a circulation of 700,000 copies a day. That means that practically 3,000,000 people read it. At least half the population of the city read my paper. It is especially true of the workmen, the poor and the people of the street and the shop. The boulevard may not take the News, granted."

Gordon, looking at the newspaper owner, thought he could detect just a shadow of resentment under the apparent indifference. "But the slum takes it and reads. I'd rather have the slum reader any time. The boulevard does not make anything but itself, but the slum makes conditions. Now, then, this is my proposition: I will give you the entire control of a page of the News to write up the conditions of the city where you expect to live or work. May I ask where? Mr. Barton has not informed me."

"I expect to live as a resident in Hope House."

"Good!" Harris exclaimed with an eagerness that was unmistakable. "You couldn't do better. Miss Andrews of course has made her work known everywhere. She has been an occasional contributor to the News. You couldn't strike out on a more popular appeal than from that place as a center. See here. Let me block out a programme for a page that will set this city to thinking as it never thought before."

He at once outlined a series of subjects for a reform page from the social settlement viewpoint which was simply marvelous in its understanding of the conditions and the needs. Barton, with a born newspaper man's instinct, grasped the details with rapidity and showed his interest in an occasional interjection or hint that at once led into further possibilities. Even the slum, with his growing feeling of repulsion for the man, which increased every

minute, could not resist an admiration for his great shrewdness and insight. And all the time he was blocking out the page Gordon thrilled at the vision opened up of what might be done for the people and by them if once a daily that was really theirs lived its life for theirs.

"Of course I understand," Harris had at last added, "that all this will mean a tremendous amount of work. That is what a daily paper means to everybody connected with it. But it need not mean that you would have to give up residence in Hope House. In fact, it would be better to continue your actual touch with the district so as to be able to give what you write for the paper color. I also realize that you have need of money to carry out some of these plans. That is the reason I stand prepared to make this offer. If you will undertake this work, I will pay you \$500 a month and in addition help carry out some of these ideas where money is needed. I don't care to say just how much I'll give. Time enough for that when we get to it."

He stopped abruptly, and then, to the surprise of the two friends, he suddenly rose and said as he came up to the table and took his hat, which he had laid down there:

"Don't answer now. Give it consideration. Whatever you choose to arrange with Barton will be satisfactory. Barton, you'd better get out to Colorado for a month, as I advised. Knowles can manage very well for awhile longer. Good night!"

He walked out, and Barton and Gordon sat silent for a moment.

"Of course he heard what you said about the paper having no influence with the best people," said Barton, with a chuckle.

"I believe he did, but his manner did not betray it except once."

"Yes, I noticed that. Oh, the old man would give his long white hand to possess real influence. That's his ambition, my boy. All he said about the boulevard and the slum was pure nonsense. He doesn't believe it any more than I do."

"I believe it, though. He spoke the truth whether he meant to or not."

"What difference?" David Barton spoke carelessly. "But this proposition, John," he added, keenly watching Gordon. "How about that, eh? The opening, the leverage, the money. Wait a minute. This confounded cough is going to get me again."

He went into the other room this time, and his coughing spell lasted so long that Gordon was alarmed. He went in where his friend was sitting with his head down between his knees, his whole body racked with the effort, and when it was over he still maintained the same position until Gordon remonstrated with him.

"David, you're in no condition to go on with work. You're killing yourself on the News. I had no idea you had such a cough. How long have you been this way?"

"The average limit of usefulness on the News," said David Barton as he lifted up his head, "is less than ten years from the time of beginning. I've been with it now going on six. The rule in a daily paper is, no old men in any department. If you see an old man anywhere around the office, he's a visitor or a stranger. Modern journalism is a man killer. I'm just one of the fools caught between the rollers. See? It's like this. Harris prizes me because I know how. But when I once let go he knows he can get another fool to take my place. Food for the lion. Three cheers for the press! It's the great agency of civilization. It's the prize life taker. It's the—look out! Here I go again!"

He put his head down and coughed so long and loudly that at the end

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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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