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A. COOPER.

September 1st, 1902.

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The Reformer

By CHARLES M. SHELDON,

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(Contnued.)

"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 American; there are two sermons, an address before the convention of Christian citizenship and a list of church duties that is never caught up with. But I question if any or all of it is as important as some of the things I want to discuss with you."

"Glad to see you, Gordon."

He paused, and his grave face lighted up with a gleam of interest that transformed his scholarly appearance into something quite different. Gordon sat down again.

"What do you think of the church, Gordon? How much is it worth after all?"

The question surprised Gordon.

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

Falmouth sat silent awhile.

"The church in this city is not doing its duty," he said at last. "I sometimes question how much it is really obeying Christ's commands. When I consider the wealth and business ability and talent and culture in my own individual church alone, I cannot help asking myself how much of it is really consecrated to the uses of the kingdom. I do not know six men in my own congregation who accept the doctrine of God's ownership of property, so plainly taught in the Bible and by Christ. When I preach on the subject, my people listen in a half amused manner, as if I were a theorist giving out ideas that will not work in the practical business world. There are not a dozen people in my whole parish who give one-tenth of their income to the religious work of the world."

"How large is your church?" Gordon asked. He was growing exceedingly interested in Falmouth's monologue, for the minister had talked on as if alone.

"We have 976 names on the church roll. There are seventy-two absentees. Over 900 resident members. There are twenty-five men in the church worth over $50,000, if their returns to the tax assessor are true. We raise for all church, missionary and benevolent purposes, including my salary, which is $2,500, the sum of $13,000 annually. We pay a quartet choir $2,000 a year. We pay an organist $900. The flower committee paid $1,700 last year for flowers and decorations in the church. At least a dozen women in the church spent $500 apiece on flowers and decorations in the church. At least a dozen women in the church spent $500 apiece on flowers and decorations in their homes for receptions and parties and gave less than $10 apiece to city missions. This sounds like a sordid and gossipy string of details, Gordon. But I am reminded of an extract from one of Starr King's essays.

"'Over against every prominent allowance for a personal luxury the celestial record book ought to show some entry in favor of the cause of destitutes and suffering humanity. For every guinea that goes into a theater or museum there ought to be some twin guinea pledged for a truth or flying on some errand of mercy in a city so crowded with misery as this. Then we have a right to our amusements, otherwise we have no right to them, and are liable every moment to impeachment in the court of righteousness and charity for our treachery to heaven and our race.'

"Rather strong, eh? But not too strong when you consider that the earth is the Lord's; the gold, the silver, the time, are all his. And when I look over my list of church members and then read the society or business columns, which tell of their uses of money for luxury and amusement, is it any wonder that I ask, 'Where is the Christian discipleship that gives so out of proportion to its own gratification compared with its duty to great causes and social needs?' Lowell's verse haunts me:

"God bends from out the deep and says:
'I gave thee of my seed to sow;
Bringest thou me my hundredfold?
Can I look up with face aglow
And answer, 'Father, here is gold?'"

"I am afraid the celestial record book will not show a very heavy deposit on the part of the luxury loving Christians of this day and generation."

"Then you consider that one of the indictments against the church of today?" Gordon asked as Falmouth raised his head and sorrowfully gazed at a picture of the crucifixion that hung over his desk.

"Yes, that and a lack of willingness to bear personal burdens, to carry crosses, to walk humbly, to apply Jesus' teaching to business, politics and amusements. There is a striking inconsistency between the church members' vows and their daily lives, especially in the business and money making world. The Christians in our churches are not making their money as they ought, many of them, and they are not giving a tenth part as much as they ought to help God's kingdom."

"That is a sweeping charge, Mr. Falmouth. Yet you remain in the church and continue to preach and act under these conditions."

"I love the church," Falmouth spoke slowly, again sinking into reverie. "My father and his were ministers. My mother is a saint if there ever was one, and her heart would almost break if she heard what I have said today, for she believes the church is God's leaven in a sinful world. So do I, but I see its need of regenerative cleansing so clearly that I am torn between remaining where I am to preach the truth from the inside and going out to do my work apart from the church as an institution. Yet where shall I go? There are no other institutions that are more Christlike than the church. The labor orders are as selfish as the church. The organizations that do not profess any religious creed are no more hopeful places for a man to stand than the place where I am now. I could lead a very quiet, easy life here if I were content to go softly in and out, preach sermons that would satisfy the intellectual or æsthetic demands of my congregation and let these problems of humanity alone. But, Gordon"—he turned his face to the visitor, and the intense passion of the man shone through the habitual gravity, and culture that otherwise distinguished him—"I am, unhappily, shall I say?—no, providentially—caught up in the social whirlwind of the age, and I cannot—I cannot let these questions rest. Woe is me if I preach not a whole gospel! And in order to preach it I must go the entire length of proclaiming Christ's Golden Rule and self denying discipleship, knowing fully that my people will grow restless under it, knowing that they are not willing to take up the cross daily in order to follow their Master. And yet there is a faithful handful. There are some who have not bowed the knee to Mammon. Perhaps more than I have known. God forgive me if I have been unjust or erred in my judgment of the church in this age."

Gordon did not venture to break the silence that followed. When Falmouth again raised his head, he said, with a rare smile:

"I envy you, Gordon. I would almost like to change places with you. You seem to be doing work that needs to be done. You are doing things. I am writing about them. Some day"—

He stopped abruptly and then asked:

"If you were in my place, what course would you take with the moneyed business men in this church to touch them with a sense of their responsibility and privilege as stewards of God's wealth?"

Gordon answered instantly:

"Get as many of them as possible to go down into Bowen street and see how the other half lives."

Falmouth's eyes gleamed.

"I doubt if they will go. I'll try it. I have never been there myself. But I see your point. You think the men and women of this city do not know the facts. You think a knowledge of the facts would teach them to do something?"

"Not necessarily. But the cultured, wealthy people in our churches as a rule know absolutely nothing from personal knowledge of the horrors of city life. They never go outside the little circle of the respectable, comfortable and in many cases luxurious conditions into which they were born. I am convinced that if 500 of the best business men in the churches of this city could see the things I have seen within the last two weeks, and know the facts that every resident in Hope House knows like the alphabet, the present awful wrongs would not be permitted in the city. The Christ method was personal familiarity with sinful conditions. He was a Saviour because he himself knew the sinner. The weakness of the church lies in the fact that it has dropped out so largely the personal factor and exists too much for its own religious life in its elaborate church services, which in so many cases have no other meaning than pride and vainglory of the participants. But I forget myself." Gordon smiled sadly. "I am not fit to criticise the church—I who for so many years dishonored her with lip service and formal worship."

"You have as much right to criticise her as any Christian if you do it in the right spirit," Falmouth said gently. Then he added: "Let us have a prayer together before you go. We need to ask forgiveness for many things and wisdom for everything."

So the two men kneeled while the minister prayed. It was a good, strong, sturdy prayer that did John Gordon good. There was no whining, no cant, no complaining. An honest heart plea for more strength, more toleration, more faith, more love, more patience, and Gordon, after a hearty handshake, went out and back to Hope House, where he had agreed to meet Falmouth and the singers a little before 3 o'clock.

(To be Continued.)

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