The ..... REFORMER

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"I'll do something, of course; I'll do something," Mr. Marsh said apologetically.

"When? What?"

"I suppose"—

Gordon interrupted, not with excitement, but calmly:

"This is your life opportunity, Mr. Marsh. Tell me frankly, if you were to donate to Hope House outright the property where No. 91 stood for park purposes would it seriously cripple your business?"

"No, I don't think it would cripple me."

"Then, will you give us that much?" Gordon asked boldly and almost bluntly. But he was not in any mood to wait or coax.

"Do you know how much that property is worth?"

"No."

"It cost me $32,000 to buy the lots and put up the tenement," Mr. Marsh said imperiously.

John Gordon was silent.

"So that you practically ask me to donate $32,000 to Hope House."

"Minus the insurance on No. 91," said John Gordon quietly.

"It was insured for $60,000," Mr. Marsh said, while his face grew a little red.

Gordon made no remark, and Mr. Marsh fidgeted in his chair and drummed with his fingers on the edge of the table.

"Why would it not be better to put up a model tenement on the lots?"

"A park would do more good."

"But the people who were burned out"—

"They must be cared for, that is true. The interest excited by the calamity may lead to the tearing down of other areas and the building of good tenements. But a park the size of the whole burned area would be of more value to Hope House than even such a model tenement as you might put up in place of No. 91."

There was silence again. Mr. Marsh got up and went into the bank. He was gone several minutes. Gordon never moved. When Marsh came back, he brought some papers.

"I'll have the property made over to Hope House," he said briefly.

"Thank you," Gordon answered simply, and again there was a silence.

"I want to make some atonement," Marsh spoke slowly. "Do you think this will be so regarded?"

"Yes; it will be a great help to us." Gordon rose, and Marsh held out his hand.

"I'll have the business attended to at once, and—and—I'll be down to Hope House some time this week."

"Thank you. We shall be glad to see you." Gordon spoke gravely, and after shaking hands he went out. As he went down the stairs he had a momentary tinge of remorse at the thought of having done Marsh some injustice or of having accepted the gift of the property churlishly and in an ungracious spirit.

But as he came back to the scene of the fire he said to himself: "Is it a case for effusive thanks that this rich man takes a fraction of the wealth that belongs to God and reluctantly lets humanity get some pleasure out of it? He broke a dozen distinct ordinances relating to tenement house construction when he ordered No. 91 built. He put up a deathtrap and received money for its use. He cowardly absented himself from a knowledge of the human misery that his building housed, and when a disaster fell directly traceable to his criminal greed he ran away from the horrors for which his own hand was responsible. Was it, therefore, in order that he, John Gordon, and Hope House and the public should fall down at the feet of this man with effusive and extravagant praise for atoning in a small degree for a tremendous wrong?

Yet that is what the public, through press and pulpit, did when it was known what Mr. Marsh had done. His act was lauded as "a most noble exhibition of philanthropy," "a splendid example to others," "fine gift outright to Hope House—Mr. Philo H. Marsh donates $25,000 worth of valuable property." Mr. Marsh's minister mentioned the gift from the pulpit and took occasion to use the incident to illustrate the growing habit on the part of rich men to give sums of money for philanthropic causes. "At what time have that pulpit ever spoken out against the lawless greed which characterized this philanthropist when he allowed his business methods to sink to the level of barter in flesh and blood because other men did the same and the breaking of ordinances was counted a trivial thing simply because everybody did it? Is it not time that the pulpit said something in condemnation of wicked and un-Christian ways of making money before it says much more in praise of those who give what they have never rightly earned? A philanthropist is not one who gives money to humanity that he has obtained by wronging humanity. Such a man is simply a highwayman giving up a part of the plunder he has iniquitously stolen.

When Gordon reached Hope House, he found waiting for him a note from Archie Penrose's aunt, Mrs. Constance Penrose.

Mr. Penrose was a society young man who had no visible means of support aside from the money his father, recently deceased, had left him. Archie Penrose had never made a cent of money by a stroke of labor of any kind, but that was nothing against him in the eyes of fond mothers with marriageable daughters. There were thousands of women in the city who would have counted themselves or their daughters as specially favored if Archie Penrose had come into the house as a suitor. It made no difference that his reputation had suffered in various ways. He had money, he was of a distinguished family, his manners were regarded as elegant, and he had an aunt who gave the most select receptions and entertainments in the city. In the sight of any man or woman of right definitions of manhood this young figurehead of an aristocratic family was simply one of the ciphers of civilization. He made nothing that added to humanity's comfort or knowledge. He contributed absolutely not one grain of helpfulness or comfort or hope to a suffering, struggling, needy world. He lived to get all the pleasure he could himself, much if not all of it gained with a total disregard for any one else's pleasure, and yet he moved through what is called the best society, courted, admired, fawned on, eagerly invited out to an endless round of social functions which a certain class of rich people in America make the most important business of their lives.

Mrs. Constance Penrose was a person of more value than her distinguished nephew. She was rich, but not given over altogether to society and its shallow enthusiasms. There were other things in which she was genuinely interested, and among them was the career of John Gordon. She had known him as a boy, had watched him through his college course and his trip abroad, and, being a woman of very decided and individual opinions, she had more than once expressed her interest in the experiment Gordon was making. More than once she had compared him to her nephew, to that young man's great disadvantage.

The note which Gordon found at Hope House was an invitation to an evening at the Penrose mansion in Park avenue.

Why have you cut yourself off from all of your former friends? Do you owe nothing to us rich sinners, as well as to the poor ones? Come and reform the boulevard if you are really in the reform business, for we need it as much as the slum. Why are there no social settlements among us? It strikes me that people like your Miss Andrews are living at the wrong end of the problem. If we could only be saved, we have the means and ability to save the other end; but I want you to come and see me and tell me about Miss Andrews. Have you fallen in love with her? And how about Luella? Young man, come and give an account of yourself. Luella will be here, and Mary and the Lowells and the Cranstons and that graceless nephew of mine, who, by the way, now that you are out of the way, is paying court to Luella. You have neglected us all shamefully. We will forgive you if you appear among us again. It will not be a large company—about twenty-five. Surely you have not cut us all out of your acquaintance forever. If you don't care for the rest, come to satisfy my curiosity about your future. You know I was one of your best friends when you were a boy in the university. I have a real interest in your future, and I am not all frivolous or given up to the whirl of the world, as I hope you know. Hoping to see you, I am your friend and well wisher, CONSTANCE PENROSE.

Gordon thoughtfully considered the invitation and finally accepted it. When the evening named by Mrs. Penrose came, he went up on the boulevard. There was nothing particularly unusual in the situation, and yet in some unexplained manner as he entered the Penrose mansion he was conscious of a strange excitement, as if before the evening was over events would occur that would make serious history for more than one of the guests.

Mrs. Penrose met him with a genuine friendliness.

"Ah, welcome, Mr. Reformer! I appreciate your coming out of your social dungeon to see us. You cannot always be living on heroics. There must be some comedy to relieve the tragedy, eh?"

"Some kinds of tragedy cannot be relieved by any kind of comedy," Gordon replied grimly. "But I'll promise not to talk shop unless I am drawn into it. You didn't ask me to come for that, did you?"

"Didn't I? You are the lion of the occasion. Everybody is talking about you."

"Let us change the subject then."

"And talk of Miss Andrews?"

"No," Gordon said coldly.

"No! Is that forbidden ground?" She spoke seriously. "I am actually interested in her and in all you are doing. Some time you must tell me. Will you?"

"Yes," he answered earnestly, a little ashamed of his curtness. "Of course I believe in it all, only I didn't wish to seem to lug it in on this occasion."

"I understand," Mrs. Penrose answered brightly, and as Gordon passed on she introduced him to Professor Emory of the university.

Gordon had heard of Professor Emory and had read two of his books. The man was a scholar and had read everything in his own line of sociology. Without meaning to do so Gordon soon found himself deep in a discussion with the professor over one phase of the social question, which one of the professor's books had touched on—"The Personal Element of Responsibility For Relief of Unjust Social Conditions."

Gordon disagreed totally with the professor's conclusions and frankly told him so. The professor blandly smiled and laid down another proposition to which Gordon found himself totally opposed. The professor again smiled in such an exasperating manner that Gordon almost lost his temper. He pulled up just in time, however. He was so near it that he asked a question that otherwise he would not have asked.

"What you say is good theory, professor, but have you ever lived among the people and studied them at first hand to see if your theory will work?"

The professor changed color and lost his bland and condescending manner.

"No, sir; I do not consider that a necessity to the proper discussion of the facts. I understand perfectly well what you mean. Nearly all social settlement residents make the same mistake. They think personal contact is necessary to a clear comprehension of situations. I do not so regard it. Not that I deprecate the service you are rendering," he added hastily, "but you exaggerate the importance of your contribution to the solution of the problem."

Gordon was spared the temptation of a reply by a voice near by and a hand laid on his shoulder.

"John, must I introduce myself? Why have you neglected us all so shamefully?"

It was his sister Mary who had just come in. Gordon was really delighted

"John, must I introduce myself?"

to see her. The swift and eventful current of events that flowed around Hope House had carried him along so tumultuously that he had let the old relations with his home drift, and yet, in spite of all that had to be counted into a swift receding past, he could not deny the strength of the blood relationship.

He turned from the professor with a feeling of relief and began to chat with his sister.

She was the same careless, thoughtless, superficial creature she had always been, and yet she had an affection for her brother that John Gordon felt was very real. It touched him, even while he was wounded by many things she carelessly uttered about his own choice of life.

"Father is not very well," she said in reply to a question. "He fell one day last week and had to be carried home from the office. I feel worried over him sometimes. I wish you were at home again."

"Do you miss me?"

"Do I? You know I do, John. Aren't you coming back ever?"

"I don't know. The old life seems unreal to me."

"Does this seem unreal?" She tapped his arm with her fan and then described a little circle with it that included the rooms and their brilliant contents. "It seems very real to me," she added with a light laugh.

John Gordon let his look go over the interior of that princely residence. All the soft, easy, luxurious appliances of modern civilization within the reach of lavish wealth were evident on every side. Velvet carpets, golden decorations, the most costly pieces of art, wood carving from Bavaria, exquisite medallions, portraits by Sandalio, and paintings the price of any one of which would have been more than the life earnings of a hundred families in the tenements—before he was aware he was putting flesh and blood values up against all that physical luxury. Then he suddenly looked into Mary's face and said, with a smile:

"The things are real enough; it is the life that is unreal."

"Don't be tragic, John," she pouted. "Have some fun tonight. You don't look as if you had been having much lately. Tell me, is it true that you and Luella have quarreled? Tell me all about it. She is coming tonight. Will it be embarrassing to you?" And then before he could answer she rattled on carelessly:

"And Miss Andrews—the papers say she is a remarkable person. Tell me, is she handsome, like Luella? Are you impressed? But how do you live in those horrors? I should think the sights and smells would be simply— Oh, Miss Cranston, you have met my brother John?"

Miss Cranston had met Mr. Gordon while he was a student in the university. John stood chatting with her awhile, and was still talking with her when dinner was announced. He took her out, in obedience to a nod from Mrs. Penrose, and when once at table he looked, quietly enough outwardly, but with inward tumult at the guests, and noted Luella seated by young Penrose at the farther end, but facing Gordon, while Penrose was almost wholly obscured by Gordon's right hand neighbor.

The dinner proceeded as usual with such dinners, only the gifted art of being all things to all guests that Mrs. Penrose possessed in such a large degree saving the occasion from the insufferable dullness of many similar gatherings. A seven course dinner in a rich woman's house may and often does afford as much real misery to the assembled company as can well be packed into a bad hour and a half.

With Mrs. Penrose as hostess affairs went on with more brilliancy. It is one thing to talk yourself, and another to get other people to talk. The latter gift, allied to a species of social genius, Mrs. Penrose possessed, and the dinner was progressing finely, seasoned with just that right degree of conversational interest which at times included every one at the table and then broke up into little groups of talk between two or four.

John Gordon talked with Miss Cranston on a variety of topics, but did not introduce any mention of his own work. Mrs. Penrose, who sat at his right, once or twice alluded to Gordon's residence at Hope House, but he answered briefly and at once reverted to something else. Evidently he did not intend to be drawn into any discussion or description of his work. Mrs. Penrose was too shrewd as well as too courteous to insist in asking questions she plainly saw were not agreeable.

"Very well, she said good naturedly. "As the lion of the occasion, if you will not roar in the presence of this audience will you favor me some time with what I am dying to know? It is not idle curiosity," she added in a lower tone. "I really am interested in your plans. I want to help."

Gordon looked up at her quickly. The thought of what this woman, with her wealth and social influence, might do if she would to bring life and light into the dead, dark places of the city kindled his imagination. It was another ray of hope to place alongside Mrs. Effingham's letters.

"Thank you," he said gratefully. "I will come and talk it over with you."

As he finished and turned his face again toward Miss Cranston he encountered Luella's glance. She instantly looked down. Once again, toward the close of the dinner, Gordon intercepted her look as it swept past all the guests and stayed just a moment with him.

Just how it all happened John Gordon never knew. The last course had been served. There was the inevitable settling back of people who had successfully observed one of the rites of polite society and were ready to enjoy the programme of the evening in another stereotyped direction.

The voice of Archie Penrose rose over the well modulated conversation:

"It's a dangerous move for any one to make, I think, professor. The classes are too much at war now. All these anarchists ought to be hunted out of society like wild beasts. She is encouraging anarchy when she encourages those people to discuss their views."

"Miss Andrews"—the bland voice of Professor Emory smote John Gordon like a blow—"is not encouraging anarchy, Mr. Penrose. You do not understand the exact situation. The men she invites into Hope House to discuss government may be mistaken as to many theories of government, but the free speech that Miss Andrews encourages among them is not dangerous to society. As I understand it, she discourages all expressions of violence and is really doing good service to the city in educating a group of men who might be dangerous into good citizens."

"Bless you, professor!" John Gordon said to himself. "You are a formal, pedantic, heartless, professional sociologist, with no more real knowledge of the humanity you are writing about than a mummy, but I'll forgive all that for what you have just said. You

What was that form lying half on the floor?

may be of no real account as a sociologist, but you are fair to your own logic, fair as a mathematical problem."

The voice of Archie Penrose rose again. Argument had no weight with him.

"But I say this is a dangerous woman. She makes the people discontented with their surroundings and creates bitterness between classes."

"I don't agree with you," the professor's smooth, easy voice answered again. "She is doing great good in her way, Mr. Gordon"—the professor was sitting three chairs below Gordon on the opposite side of the table—"you are surely in a position to verify my statements about this estimable woman. Set this misguided young man right in the matter. He has been misinformed by some one."

Every face at the table was turned toward John Gordon except Luella's. She looked down at the table. It was very still. Penrose was red and nervous. Just how he had precipitated the discussion Gordon did not know until several weeks afterward. It was enough that the entire subject of his personal life work was now at once the object of interest to all these people. It was the last situation in the world he would have chosen for himself, but it had been thrust upon him through no seeking of his own. In the hush that waited his answer to the professor Gordon saw a blue eyed woman digging with bleeding hands at a ruin out of which ghastly faces peered, and it was the vision of a whole life that for fifteen years had flung itself down into the tragedy of humanity to save it regardless of suffering to itself.

"Miss Andrews," he said quietly, but his soul was shaken with the passion of his long repressed feelings, "is to my mind the most gifted, most useful, most Christian woman in this whole city. She is today suffering more, giving more and doing more to right the wrongs of our boasted civilization than any other woman of my acquaintance. The man who says she is dangerous to society does not know what he is saying. Miss Andrews is the superior of every person here at this table in all the gifts and graces of the highest developed womanhood."

He need not have said that last sentence. It was not at all necessary. But his spirit was at high tension. The contrast between the selfish, heartless, luxurious, even vicious social life represented by some of the persons at that table in addition to Archie Penrose and the patient, loving sacrificing life of the head of Hope House voiced his indignant assertion. Luella did not look up. She sat as cold and still as a statue.

Mrs. Penrose, with a tact that did her great credit, broke the silence by asking just the right question. Just what it was Gordon himself did not remember when he went all over the scene afterward; but, whatever it was, it led the way naturally to a description of Hope House settlement, and John Gordon found himself doing what he had declared to Mrs. Penrose he would not do—he was soon pouring out the story of Bowen street and Tommy Randall and Mrs. Caylor and Louie and all the heartbreaking conditions of the pale dwellers in the tenements.

Had ever man such an audience? It is not often the reformer can reach the men and women of society. He talks to the crowd, vaguely conscious all the time that the rich, cultured, leisure classes either do not care or do not know or do not understand and never go to hear him.

But for over half an hour Gordon said his say. He spared not one syllable of horrors. The guests paled at his description of the fire and shuddered at the picture of the child's arm thrust up out of the ruins and circling Barton's neck in a convulsive death agony. Luella looked up once. Her eyes glowed with a feeling that John Gordon interpreted into deep compassion, and his heart bounded. For a moment he lost control of himself. Then he went on steadily.

When he was through Mrs. Penrose quietly signaled for the company to rise. In the other rooms, as the guests seated themselves at card tables for the rest of the evening, different ones took up the topic and a certain unusual hush pervaded the perfumed atmosphere that was a stranger to the gossiping company.

Mrs. Penrose passed out by Gordon.

"You made a deep impression," she said half admiringly, half seriously. "I had no idea you could talk so well."

"I did not intend"—

"Of course not. All the better. Archie got his answer. So did we." She laughed a little cynically. "It will do us good. Did I not tell you we need reforming—worse than the slums?"

To Gordon's great relief Mary came up and said she felt uneasy for her father, and begged Mrs. Penrose to excuse her.

"You will go home with me, John, won't you? I came with the Cranstons. Father needs me. He did not look well when he came home this evening."

"It must be serious if Mary is ready to leave this early," he thought. But he was glad to escape the formality of the rest of the evening. As he went out with his sister he had a view of Luella seated listlessly at the table where young Penrose was.

On the way home Mary seemed uneasy. She was suffering also from a headache and sharply accused her brother of lugging his reform business into the company's talk. John Gordon was silent. Afterward he learned that young Penrose's attention to Luella was the real source of Mary's bad feelings.

As they mounted the familiar steps he felt strangely oppressed, as if some new or unexpected trouble was about to come into his life. The excitement incident to his defense of Miss Andrews had given way to a dull depression that weighed him down and gave him a foreboding.

One of the servants was in the hall. He said that Mr. Gordon had gone into the library early in the evening and had given orders not to be disturbed.

John and Mary went into the reception room. The library was next. They entered it side by side.

What was that form lying half on the floor, half on one of the leather cushioned chairs?

Gordon sprang forward as Mary cried out. They lifted him and laid him on the couch. A frightened servant appeared at the door. But John Gordon knew as he looked into the stern old face that the soul of Rufus Gordon had gone to God, who gave it, to give account of the deeds done in the body, whether they were good or whether they were bad.

CHAPTER IX.

"What right have you to talk to me so?"

EARTH to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," said Paul Falmouth as he stood by the grave of Rufus Gordon. "Here to await the general resurrection in the last day and the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ."

John Gordon, with his sister and their aunt, Mrs. Hester Wayland, Rufus Gordon's only sister, stood on the other side of the grave. Mary was heavily dressed in mourning and clung to John Gordon's arm sobbing. Falmouth offered a brief prayer, pronounced the benediction and then came around to the three and shook hands silently. The crowd of acquaintances that had known the distinguished financier departed, discussing as they went the future of the business involved by the death, and its relation to the son, who was a stranger to most of the men in the city, except as they had read of his eccentric career at Hope House.

"Strange how a man of Gordon's exact methods can neglect such a thing. I remember now there was Judge Lewis of the circuit court neglected," etc.

"Gordon isn't the first man to put off attending to a matter of that sort. I suppose the estate goes in absence of a will to his son?" one of the visiting friends of the broker questioned.

"Yes, and the son is a crank, I'm told; been living in the slums for a fad." The speaker got into his automobile, and he and his friends were soon speeding toward the city at the rate of thirty miles an hour. Gordon's fad was a slum. The broker's fad was a racing machine. There are fads and fads.

"I think I could give a guess at Gordon's failure to make a will," quietly remarked another financier, who had been present at the funeral.

His companion gave him a questioning look.

"He didn't have much of anything to will," was the answer.

"How's that?" The exclamation expressed great surprise. "Gordon was one of the solid men of the city."

"It may be. But, mark my prophecy, the old man lost his cunning along toward the last. Those who watched him closest saw signs of breaking down in him more than a year ago. He went too heavily into L. and D. stock. Conway's deal last spring turned out bad for Gordon. No one knows how hard he was hit at the time, but—you watch developments. If the son gets the house and lots out of what's left, he will do well."

"He was not"—

"The old man was strictly honorable in his relation to all trusts. All he lost was his own, so far as that goes. But I am much mistaken if he did not lose just about everything."

During the week that followed Rufus Gordon's affairs gradually became common material for gossip on the street. Ten days after the body of the "wealthy banker" had been put in the ground the business world knew that, with the exception of his home and a small annuity belonging to his daughter, the wealth of Rufus Gordon had vanished, dissipated in that kind of speculation which borders on gambling so closely that the most conscientious business men cannot always decide where legitimate business ends and the gambler's luck begins.

Down at Hope House Paul Falmouth, who had come in to consult with Miss Andrews about some work his people had volunteered for her, was talking over John Gordon's affairs when he came into the library. Miss Andrews was called out, and the two men were left together. Since Barton's death Gordon had felt drawn toward Falmouth. There was something very wholesome and helpful about the man when one came to know the real man beneath the scholarly, refined, deeply sensitive nature.

"Then your father's death will really make little difference with your future?"

(To be Continued.)