

# The Reformer

By CHARLES M. SHEDDEN

Author of "In His Steps," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," Etc.

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For a moment he felt so completely alone that he let go of every motive for action. The city and the overwhelming thought of its misery and sin and selfishness enraged him. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" he cried out, and nothing at that moment would have saved John Gordon except the fact that what he had mentioned to his father and sister and Luella as his religious experience was the greatest fact so far in his career. As he stood still there at the foot of the steps gradually his spirit grew calmer. The consciousness of God in his life grew stronger. The purpose of his ambition cleared. And after a little while he started on, knowing that his life would not be changed in its main intent by anything that had so far happened. Only as he went on he also knew that he could not and would not be the same man and do the same things in some parts of his earthly vision as if Luella Marsh had decided to walk with him in the way. It was also quite clear to him that without being able to give a good reason for it he was not closing the chapter with Luella yet. He certainly entertained the idea of her still coming into his life. It was not from his interview with her that he drew any such hope. But he knew that he did not yet consider her action as final, or possibly it was his own action that was not final.

He stopped at a corner, and the sight of a street name on a car going by decided his next movement.

"I'll go and take tea at Hope House," he said to himself, and took the car, noting, by the time, that he would reach the house just as the little family of residents were in the habit of sitting down to their evening meal.

Hope House stood in the midst of its desert of tenements and its corner saloons and vaudeville halls like an oasis of refuge and strength. Saloons to right and left and front and rear, with piles of brick and wood and rubbish fung together in chaotic, tumbled heaps, with openings for human beings who streamed in and out of court and alley and doorway or sat in pallid, huddled masses on the stoops or curbing formed the frame in which Hope House was set, unique and alone.

John Gordon left the car one block from Hope House and walked down past five saloons in the block until he came to the arched entrance of the house. Going into the little court, he breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of the familiar oleander tubs that stood against the outer wall of the court, and marveled at their ability to blossom with such freshness in such surrounding.

"If oleanders ever had any fragrance in this part of the city, they must almost smell of beer and sewer gas," he said to himself as he went on into the broad hall that opened on the court. He was by no means a stranger to Hope House. Since his return from abroad he had been a frequent visitor and had been welcomed with that ingenuous welcome that springs from well known common purposes.

"You are just in time!" called out a quiet but cheerful voice as John Gordon stepped into the doorway of the dining hall. "Miss Manning is absent. You may take her seat by me."

"I count myself fortunate," John Gordon replied as he took the seat, returning the greetings of those at the table.

"We were talking about you," said the head of the house, with her quiet but earnest manner.

"I'm sorry to interrupt the conversation," replied John Gordon.

"No interruption, we assure you. We are glad you came in, for you are the only person who can answer a question Mr. Ford just asked."

"Rather a personal question, Mr. Gordon," said Ford, a student from the university, who was a resident of several months' standing. "The question I asked Miss Andrews was this: 'What is Mr. Gordon going to do? Will he possibly come in here with us?'"

John Gordon did not answer the question at once. He knew the complete freedom of the social atmosphere of Hope House, especially at meal-times, and understood well that his silence would not be misconstrued as discourtesy.

He looked around the circle of earnest, friendly faces at the table, and his gaze included, as it had many times before, the room itself, with its high, dark wainscoting, its few but choice portraits, its plain but attractive homeliness; but, as on every other occasion, his look finally came back to the face of the head of the house, for she was the genius of the place.

Grace Andrews was in her thirty-sixth year. At the time John Gordon first met her at Hope House she had been in charge of the settlement for twelve years. Twelve years of association with desperate human problems such as those that swarmed like the people themselves had left on her face marks of that human, divine calmness that all great women bear who have loved the people. If Grace Andrews did not impress strangers or visitors as being great in any real sense, it was because the look of her face spoke of a quiet peace that so many people superficially associate with meekness, but do not consider as

an element of power. The residents of Hope House understood all that, and the oldest residents understood it better than the youngest and had more unquestioned reverence for the greatness of Grace Andrews than those who had less knowledge of her.

It was with a deepening consciousness of what this woman was and of her wonderful life and influence that John Gordon came into her presence. He had met her during his university career when some special studies had taken him down to Hope House. And one of the first places he had visited on his return from abroad had been the dining room with its fellowship life presided over by that central figure that dominated the entire group. It was at that first meeting that he had frankly told her and the residents something of his religious experience and its bearing on his life work. It was that frank confidence that had led up to the question by Ford.

"Well?" Miss Andrews finally said as John Gordon seemed ready to speak after looking at her so intently. During his silence the conversation at the table had gone on in a quiet but natural fashion. Every one in Hope House always gave every one else perfect freedom for his personality, and no one felt at all disturbed when John Gordon did not reply at once to the student's query. They all paused in their talk when he spoke.

"I've been thinking of it. I would count it an honor to be part of your family," he spoke to Miss Andrews, but included all the table with a gesture. "I'm still in some doubt concerning my future. I am sure you are enough interested in me to care to know that I have left my own home. I am just at present without a permanent place of abode. Perhaps you would be willing to take me in."

He spoke somewhat lightly, but not without a certain seriousness that all seemed to understand. Miss Andrews glanced at him quickly and said with a real tone of sympathy:

"We would not only give you a hearty welcome, Mr. Gordon, but count ourselves fortunate to have you with us."

"Thank you," he replied gratefully. "I would not come into the house, of course, except as one who would take the position of a learner. I have every thing to learn and nothing to contribute. You would have to teach me the simplest duties of a resident, Miss Andrews. I at least would be a very willing and obedient pupil."

"I have no doubt of that," she replied, with a smile. "But the people who act that way are dangerously apt to be in a position to teach their teachers in time."

"I shall never be able to teach the teacher in Hope House," said John Gordon earnestly. Miss Andrews laughed, and the faintest tinge of color appeared on her cheeks. "We are all learners here. Let him who has not learned something today hold up his hand. Not a hand in sight. Oh, we are all in the primary class! The people are the alphabet of God. And we have not yet learned the alphabet."

The talk gradually circled the table, while John Gordon continued to tell Miss Andrews something in detail of the interview with his father and sister. After the meal was over the residents scattered to their work, but half a dozen with Miss Andrews and John Gordon lingered a few minutes in the library and living room, which opened out of the wide hall, next the old-fashioned staircase which went up near the center of the room, for Hope House had formerly been an old family mansion, and it stood now in its solitary refinement of interior in complete contrast to every building in the dismal district now ruled and ruined by the human ruins that pleaded day and night for rebuilding until the souls of the residents grew weary with the burden, and God either grew daily farther away or closer by, in proportion as the workers in the settlement grew more and more to love the people or more and more to lose faith in their redemption.

When John Gordon finally went away, he had practically promised to become a permanent resident of Hope House. Something of John Gordon's family history was known to most of the residents, and there was enough of the romantic and unusual in such a decision as his to stir the imagination of the earnest young men and women who had thrown in their lot with Hope House and what it stood for in the city.

When John Gordon came out from the archway and turned into the street, it was after 9 o'clock. He walked along for half a dozen blocks, trying to realize what his life work would be in such a place. Whatever else it would be, he knew it would be a life that would demand inexorably all the manhood possible. As he stopped and looked back down the street and realized its wretchedness, its discomfort, its squalor, its moral filth, his heart cried out for strength, his soul felt compassion and anger and longing, and his love of the people, to his intense satisfaction, grew in spite of what they were and because of what they were.

He was still standing there, absorbed in his thought of future possibilities, when a man put his hand on his shoulder and said familiarly:

"John, do you want good company? I'm with you if you do."

"David!" cried John Gordon in astonishment. "How do you happen to be here?"

"Studying life, eh?" said David Barton as he put his arm within his friend's and walked on.

"But how does it happen that you—"

"Having a week's vacation. Harris told me I'd better go to Colorado. Been down here every night."

John Gordon walked on in deepening astonishment.

"Come up to the rooms and let us have a talk," said Barton, and John Gordon quietly agreed. They took a car and after riding two miles left the car, walked two blocks and came out on Park Boulevard, where David Barton, managing editor of the Daily News, had apartments.

When they were seated, David Barton turned a sharp, nervous, but kindly face toward John Gordon.

"Surprised to see me down in the region of Hope House? Great place, isn't it? Worth more than a trip to the Rockies to go through the show."

"Do you mean to say you have never been down around Hope House before?"

"I've been there several times, my son."

"You know Miss Andrews?"

"Know her before you were out of high school?"

"You never told me."

"Why should I tell you everything at once?"

"Several years is not at once," replied John Gordon, with a smile.

"For answer the older man gravely said after a pause:

"How old are you, John?"

"Thirty."

"And I'm forty. The pace is killing me. Harris says I may last five years more. I doubt it. He is evidently anxious to keep me going the five years. Do I look bad?"

He thrust his pale, nervous face forward, and John Gordon was almost shocked at his friend's manner. He was so much moved that he rose and went over and laid his hand on the other man's arm.

"David, you're not well. Why don't you take Harris' advice and go out to Colorado, not for a week, but for a year?"

"As bad as that?" David Barton said dryly. "I think I'm good for the five years. But tell me about yourself."

"I've left home, and I'm going to take up residence in Hope House."

"No! What! Live there?"

David Barton seemed to pay no attention to the fact of his friend's leaving home.

"I've been there tonight and made definite arrangements with Miss Andrews. I must go there in order to fit myself for my work."

"Your work?"

"Yes; for the people," replied John Gordon simply.

"Pooh! The people!"

David Barton snuffed contemptuously. "Who knows who the people are?" He stopped suddenly, and his whole manner changed. His sharp, abrupt, indifferent alertness was smothered out of his face like magic. He rose and walked through the room while John Gordon, who understood his moods quite well, listened in astonishment.

"John, listen to me. I believe I know something of your plans and ambitions. You're the only man I know who would do what you propose to do. I don't have much faith in it. At the same time I believe in you, John. I spoke contemptuously of the people, but in my heart, John, I love the people. I am one of them. Tonight as I saw children rotting in those holes I could have died for them. But the martyr's stuff is not in me to die for them except by proxy. Let me tell you, John, you are going at the thing back-handed. What do you want to go and live in Hope House for? Miss Andrews is doing splendid work, but even her efforts don't accomplish anything. Conditions are as bad there now as they were twelve years ago. It's good flesh and blood thrown to the lions while the politicians and the gang look on and laugh at the human helplessness. Why, it is simply an outrage on civilization that a city like this lets a woman like Miss Andrews die by martyrdom in that infernal hell on earth and never gives her the financial and social support she ought to have. And the bounds that own the tenements and saloons and vaudeville property live in luxury and pose as leaders in society and allow conditions to be created that roll a stream of desperate human problems over Miss Andrews that will kill her in a few years. Yes, kill her!"

David Barton spoke with a savage energy that made John Gordon shudder. But when Barton had been silent a moment he continued in a calmer tone to make a proposition to John Gordon that John was totally unprepared for.

"Instead of going into Hope House why don't you come into the News? I can speak for Harris that he will give you full swing on the reform page of your own. You can have it all your own way. I'll help you with special stories and pictures that will make the property owners around Riverside street squirm. Harris is savage with the mayor because of last year's campaign. He'll be glad to get even with the administration by showing up the rotten concern. I tell you, John, there's an earthquake going to rattle the city hall this winter, and Harris and the News will be one name for the earthquake. The old man is just in the mood for pushing the reform business in the name of the people. He will agree to anything I say. The press is the only real power left in the city anyhow. Think of what you can do for the people with the News back of you. We can make a special business of the slum holes and make it mighty interesting for some of the old moneybags of this God forsaken metropolis. Don't answer at once. At any rate, give me time to cough."

David Barton sat down close by John Gordon and had a coughing spell that lasted a few minutes. John Gordon silently watched him, steadily excited by the offer just made to him. Could he accept it? Was it not one of those opportunities that men have come to them but once? What might he not do

for the people if a whole page of a great, powerful, practically boundless, wealthy paper were at his disposal? The material he could put before the public! The conditions he could expose! The wrongs he could right! The lives he might save! The possibilities grew larger every moment he thought of it.

David Barton finally ceased coughing and spoke again.

"Well, will you come into the News? What do you say?"

But John Gordon did not answer at once. Suddenly he had thought of Luella Marsh. If she would not marry him as a resident of Hope House, would she not be proud to be the wife of a writer on one of the most powerful dailies of the world? And the same object would be gained for the people. But how about his declaration that he must know the people by direct knowledge gained by living among them? Yet could he not do that in some way and still put this modern lever of the press under the problem?

He faced his friend with strong feeling. The day had been full of events for him, but this closing event affected him in some ways deeper than all the rest.



CHAPTER III.

"You're killing yourself," said John Gordon 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 \$2,000,000 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 no faith in Harris, and 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 Travelling Public! Danger Explained by Professor Roltger 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 Spree 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! One Teaches 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."

"Rottiness at Dr. Lumme's Extravagance! Policeman Murphy Scores a Hit at Alderman Schwartz! Turn on the Light!"

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

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

"War! The Sultan is Growing More Defiant! Orders Out Bosphorus 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."

"You 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."

"I'm almost sure of it," 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 to his head as a man came into the room and exclaimed, "Mr. Harris!" at the same time sending a questioning dash 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."

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 of intense experiences. At the same time there was a serious alertness about him that was very noticeable. He was not blasé 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 coldly. 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 slum 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."

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