

# The Reformer

By CHARLES M. SHILDON  
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The voice sank, and yet even in that last struggle the change from his apparent flippancy to the profoundest seriousness was like the change from sun to shade. "One thing, John. Once you said I never loved any one. I've left some books and things to Hope House. There's money enough to bury me—directions in desk—don't have a procession over a mile long." The voice came back to its seriousness again. "You said I never loved any one—Grace Andrews—John—you understand?" The eye spoke the rest. And in the tumultuous grief that flooded John Gordon's soul he filled in the broken gaps of that sorrowful but fragrant romance. The voice was a whisper when it spoke again. "No use, don't tell her—only add to her burden—God bless her—best woman in this city—she!"

The voice went out altogether, and John Gordon realized that the spirit of that brave heart would soon cease from all the earth's struggles. He summoned the doctor again and the nurse and Harris came in. There was nothing to do. Gordon held his hand as the night deepened. Near midnight he rallied and whispered to Gordon, with a smile: "I love you, John. Good-by."

At 2 o'clock his spirit quietly went out like a child falling asleep, and Gordon rose and passed into the other room, trying to realize what all this meant, a richer man for this experience of human friendship, but a poorer man for the loss out of his earth struggle of one of the bravest, tenderest, truest souls his manhood would ever know.

"Dear David!" he said and let the tears flow unrestrained. "Your hopeless love story. Hopeless? Did ever man love a woman like Grace Andrews without ennobling himself?" And when a little later he went in and saw the cold, pale face he thought he could see there the triumph of love's great work in the glory which it always leaves with humanity, for as long as the world shall stand and men shall suffer, so long shall the true love of man for woman redeem the earth from its curse and give to both a place of honor with the divine.

## CHAPTER VIII.



Gordon read this letter with glistering eyes.

JOHN GORDON was reading the two letters that David Barton had received from the old lady, Mrs. Captain George Effingham. The funeral service had been held in obedience to Barton's request. Gordon, Harris, Williams and a small group of newspaper men had come up to the rooms. Falmouth read a simple service, and he and Gordon and Harris and Williams afterward went out to the cemetery. When it was all over, Gordon, in accordance with his friend's wishes, came back to the rooms. Barton's will left most of his personal effects to his friend. The furniture and books he gave to Hope House. A small sum of money was divided among a few of the Colorado people who had been helped by Barton and were still in need.

After Gordon had attended to these simple details, his heart still burning over the events that had become history after the fire, he at last came to Barton's desk and the disposal of its contents. There was almost no correspondence. A simple formal note addressed to Mrs. Andrews asked her to accept the furniture, pictures and books and use them in whatever way seemed best to her. Any stranger might have written it. As Gordon read the cold, formal statement he said to himself, "She will never know—I suppose it's all right—but oh, David, to think of dying of hunger!"

One of the letters from Mrs. Effingham had been opened. It was dated eight days earlier than the other, which had come to Barton on the day of his death, and still remained unopened. The first letter was written in a fine, close style, but remarkably legible and free from wavering or uncertain endings.

Mr. David Barton:  
My Dear Sir—The promise I made to your friend Mr. Gordon that I would write you after seeing my grandson is a promise I take pleasure in fulfilling herewith.

to a large degree, but the physicians say he must remain in this climate or he will be in danger of a collapse. This is a disappointment to me personally, as I had hoped to take him back with me to Salem. The Lord and sometimes the physicians know better than we do, and I am resigned to the Lord's will as regards the doctors' unless this is a scheme on their part to make something out of my grandson's case. I shall stay here until I find out.

Mr. Barton, sir, words of mine cannot say to you the deep gratitude I feel for the great kindness you showed my poor wandering grandson. When you stopped him that night and put your hand on his shoulder and said a loving word to him, you saved him from something worse than death of the body. He was on the point of cursing God and dying. The Lord bless you, sir, and give you peace.

Now, I realize, of course, that you are not one to demand reward other than that which comes to every brave soul that does its duty, but I am a rich old woman, with no relatives except this boy out here, and I would count it a great honor to be privileged to do something with a portion of my means in some way that you might suggest. In a city like yours there are, of course, very many causes that appeal to your humanity. What makes your heart ache the most? Let me know where a few thousand dollars will do the most good. I have looked into your face, sir, though you never saw mine, and I know full well that the time here with you is brief. Thank God, sir, it has been brave. When you and I meet on the other side, the fifty and five odd years difference in our lives will not be any gulf between us, for my heart has never grown old, and I shall be rejoiced to count you among the noble friends who have made life worth while. The captain will be glad to meet you. Tell him I have not forgotten how he looks and how he has not changed overmuch! I am, sir, with great respect and gratitude, faithfully yours,  
MRS. CAPT. GEORGE EFFINGHAM.

The allusion to the captain made Gordon smile a little. But his face regained its usual quiet seriousness as he took up the second letter and slowly opened and read it.

My Dear Friend—I hasten at once to answer your reply to my letter, for you are sure to desire that the days are few for you on the earth. God grant you peace, sir, both of mind and spirit.

What you say about your friend Mr. Gordon and the work he is doing interests me exceedingly. I have read a little about Mrs. Andrews and I believe she is doing it. If either she or Mr. Gordon will write me stating the immediate needs of the settlement, I will send something. The only condition I make is a request that my name be not used anywhere in connection with the gift. I don't want to see my name over a doorway, "The Mrs. Captain George Effingham Retreat" or "The Mrs. Captain George Effingham Free Reading Room and Library." Aside from Mrs. Andrews' care with the money, only I want to know how much will do something real well. I like the idea of putting it into something that will help children. Why on earth any one wants to live in a city if he can live anywhere else is a puzzle to me, but after they once get there I suppose we can't ask too many questions about it; at least asking the questions will not relieve the situation that has already been made. I am sure the captain will be pleased with the use made of his money. If he asks you any questions about it, tell him I have saved enough to bury my poor old body decently and left the house and furnishings to the East India Marine museum. He need not worry about anything.

If you are not able to answer this, turn the whole matter over to your friend. I shall await a letter from him or from Mrs. Andrews. The Lord bless you, sir, and may he meet you himself you pass over. With respect and affection, your friend,  
MRS. CAPT. GEORGE EFFINGHAM.

John Gordon read this letter with glistering eyes. The hand of David Barton seemed to reach out from the shadows and grasp his own with his old hearty benignant cheerfulness. "God bless you, David!" Gordon said reverently as he put the letters in his pocket and hastened down to Hope House to show them to Grace Andrews.

As she read her blue eyes grew thoughtful. It seemed at last as if some part of her desire for the people was going to be gratified.

"She does not say how much she wants to give," Miss Andrews remarked as she finished reading.

"No, only she says, 'I want to know how much will do something, real well.'"

"We could use almost any amount," the words were uttered softly and the gaze of the blue eyes was on the scene visible from the library windows.

The district burned over was about three blocks on one side of Hope House and two blocks on the other. Compared with the entire tenement district it was only a black speck on the city map. The people who were burned out were now crowded into the other tenements. If conditions of overcrowding before the fire were indescribable, they were now beyond endurance even to the wretches who had before endured the indescribable. The city had begun the work of cleaning away the debris in Bowen street, but progress was slow. Carts were going by filled with rubbish. Hope House itself contained still many victims whose condition was so precarious that they could not yet be removed to the hospitals. The resources of the building had been taxed to its extreme limit. But the outside scene was what Miss Andrews saw now with some gleam of promise shining out of those letters. Groups of children gathered over the burned area, poking in the ashes or among the bricks and lime for trifles that were eagerly treasured as souvenirs of the tragedy. The whole dreary, dismal, melancholy wretchedness of the scene had not one ray of comfort anywhere, except that which lay in the two letters in her lap. And even with that what could be done?

"If that desert of ashes could be transformed into a park, Miss Andrews," Gordon suggested. They had both reached the same conclusion at the same time.

"Parks and playgrounds, the two sweet 'P's' of my life," she said wistfully, "but it would cost!"

"How much do you suppose Mrs. Captain George Effingham is worth?"

"I have no idea, have you?"

"Not the least. Why not write and give her a frank account of the facts? If the old lady wants to add some of the spiky fragrance of life to children, here is her opportunity. Let Ford send her photographs of the burned district, including the swarms of children like

those out there now, and let us leave it to her to give what she will."

"That is good. Will you write the letter?"

"No; you write it. She knows you by reputation. I am a nobody to her." "Very well. I will write the letter. You and Mr. Ford secure the photographs."

Gordon and Ford went out that afternoon and secured several photographs taken by newspaper men at the time of the fire itself. In two days the group was made up and, together with Miss Andrews' letter, sent on to Mrs. Captain George Effingham, as strong a plea for parks and playgrounds as human language and the camera ever presented. Gordon read the letter and marveled at it. It set his heart a-fire. It made him long for millions to give, to buy up city deserts and transform them into paradise. It was the reading of this letter that caused him to wonder with increased amazement at the extravagant and heartless wickedness of a luxurious civilization that spends more on the things it eats than it gives to feed starved childhood in a year. If Jesus were here on the earth again, would he not say to the rich men and women in the cities: "Woe unto you, hypocrites! Calling yourselves, many of you, by my name, yet living in needless luxury, pampering your bodies, seeking pleasure and ease, while the blood of little children spatters the wheels of your carriages as you drive haughtily through the streets! And ye cry: 'Lord, Lord, have I not gone to church? Have I not paid the highest pew rent and attended divine service regularly in my own church and given something annually to support missions? Yea, verily, you have done these things, but for every dollar to religion and charitable work you have spent a hundredfold on your own self-satisfied existence. Verily ye have received your reward. But the time is coming when there shall be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see little ones who have despised entering into the kingdom of heaven and you yourselves shut out and hear me say: 'Depart from me. I never knew you!'"

Before the letter to the old lady had gone its way to do its errand, while the settlement workers waited in suspense for its results, Miss Andrews received a letter by messenger. She read it and quietly placed it in John Gordon's hands. The letter was from Luella.

My Dear Miss Andrews—I inclose a check for \$1,000, which may be of use to you in relieving some of the distress caused by the recent terrible disaster in Bowen street. I hope to be able soon to add to this. Will you kindly inform Mr. Gordon that my father returned this morning and is at his office? With best wishes, I am heartily yours,  
LUELLA MARSH.

Gordon read the letter through without looking up. He knew that Miss Andrews had heard of his former relation to Luella through the sensational accounts printed by the News.

He handed the letter back, simply saying:

"The money will be useful just now."

In reality he regarded the gift as conscience money. Luella was disturbed over her father's responsibility for the whole unnecessary horror. She sent a thousand dollars to ease her feelings. But would a hundred or even a million times a thousand dollars ever bring back to life the creatures that went down to death with the tenement? Would it ever restore to health and joy the scores of maimed and broken wretches that lingered on in torture and lifelong dependence?

His heart was cold toward this woman who had once been dearer than all the world to him. At the same time he knew that the sight of her beautiful face would appeal to the old feelings.

"I am going to see Mr. Marsh," he at last said briefly as if he felt the silence was becoming embarrassing.

"Can you persuade him to give us the site of the double-decker for a part of our proposed park?" Miss Andrews asked calmly.

"I don't know. He has acted the coward in running away. I don't know how deep his feelings have been touched, whether they have worked down to his pocketbook or not, but I'll go and see him."

"You will not lose your temper?"

The question came with a quiet tone of gentle caution that Gordon felt sounding in his ears as he entered Mr. Marsh's office. It guided him with unusual influence to check the indignant impulse that otherwise might have made him say or do the unnecessary thing.

Mr. Marsh greeted him with evident embarrassment.

"Glad to see you, Gordon," he said, shaking hands cordially.

"Are you?" Gordon thought. But he simply said:

"I don't need to tell you what my errand is, Mr. Marsh."

"That unfortunate fire; I—yes, of course—I know. Business interests called me out of town that morning or I—"

The older man was speaking hastily, and his eye wandered uneasily. Gordon wanted to say "You lie!" but instead he replied:

"Very sorry you had to go away. For many reasons I wish you might have seen some things. There are signs that—"

"For God's sake, Gordon, don't torture me by enumerating them—will you! Just as if I had not seen them in my dreams every night since reading the account!" the man ejaculated. "Of course I lied to you just now. I had no business to call me out of town. I simply ran away from the horror of the thing, that's all!"

John Gordon rose up and his eyes gleamed; but it was with hope.

"Mr. Marsh, the past cannot be changed, but it can be atoned for. What will you do now?"

"I don't know, what can I do?"

"Give us the site of the old dumbbell tenement for a playground, or better

still, help us transform the whole of the burned district into a park."

"It will be very expensive"—Mr. Marsh faltered.

"It has already been very expensive in the cost of life. Was Louie's death necessary? Were all those deaths—"

Gordon was beginning to grow excited when the thought of Miss Andrews stopped him. But he had been



"I'll have the property made over to Hope House."

on a great strain for many days and nights, and this rich man's evident hesitation to incur any financial loss to save life irritated him. It was maddening to Gordon to realize, as he had in the short time he had been at Hope House, the misdirected energies of money makers. The love of humanity with which he had begun his knight-hood was already such a passion in him that it leaped with giant bounds over all smaller objects. He was not able to realize the slow steps with which such men as Mr. Marsh have to be coaxed and terrified and even driven toward a little philanthropy. John Gordon was beginning to have the same absence of feeling for indifference toward social needs that a perfectly sound physical nature has toward a confirmed dyspeptic or hypochondriac. The logic of the situation around Hope House was so absolutely thought out to John Gordon's mind that it leaped with giant bounds over all smaller objects. He was not able to realize the slow steps with which such men as Mr. Marsh have to be coaxed and terrified and even driven toward a little philanthropy.

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