The ..... REFORMER

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CHAPTER VII.

"It's Mrs. Caylor!"

THE ladders went up quickly, but to the breathless crowd that now blackened every housetop and choked Bowen street with a mass of upturned white faces touched with the glow of fire it seemed as if the company was unusually slow. Before the ladders had reached a perpendicular, before they had resolved, swaying over toward the building, a dozen faces appeared at the upper windows beside the child with her charge, beckoning frantically for help.

"See! See there!" Barton cried again with the same nervous tension which he had shown since leaving his rooms.

A figure leaped out of the upper window, whirled over twice, striking the upper extension of the ladders, and fell into the street. The crowd groaned. A second figure stood out on a window sill and, throwing up its arms, with a shrill cry more beastly than human, flung itself out toward the ladders now leaning over toward the building. It was a woman. She actually touched one of the ladder rounds with her fingers and for a second the crowd thought she had grasped it, but for only a second. The body shot downward, and Barton and Gordon closed their eyes and involuntarily put their hands up over their ears to shut out the horrible sound. Again the crowd groaned, and a wild beast yell arose.

"The life blanket!" some one shrieked, and it was only after the whole thing was history that Bowen street learned that owing to the narrow courts and the broken pavements the department was fatally hindered in all its movements and the wagon carrying the life blanket had overturned at a corner, killing the driver and maiming one of the horses so that it had to be shot. Make out another indictment for murder against a municipality which deliberately robs the people of its rights in order to keep the wheels of the political machine moving. What are human lives compared with the spoils of office and the plunder that is a part of political service to the powers that be?

The ladder fell over and touched the window sill where the child of the moments was standing with her burden, and then a scene occurred that will never leave John Gordon as long as he toils on bearing human woes on his brave and bleeding heart.

The child suddenly disappeared, and in her place could be seen two men and a woman fighting like wild beasts for the first comer at the ladder which rested on the sill. A fireman was climbing up and had almost reached the window ledges. At the other windows wild, imploring faces begged in agony for life. Two more forms were seen to jump from the windows at the corner furthest from the ladder. The fire was now bursting through the roof, and one group from the window next the ladders above the ladder fell back as if a door had given way—all this in the few seconds it took to be burned into Gordon with awful detail—which he saw the ladder rise to a perpendicular as if some giant hand had pushed it back. It rose and it stood straight, the solitary figure of the fireman silhouetted against the blazing wall, and then the entire front of the house, with a roar that gathered volume in a sickening rush of death, fell over into the street, burying in one mingled mass the fireman who had been standing on the ladder, his companion at the foot and the crowd in the street that, caught in a trap, could not escape even if there had been time to give warning of the danger.

For one awful second Gordon and Barton, who had been standing just outside the reach of the falling wall, looked into the blazing interior of the tenement. Figures within that roaring furnace leaped down into it from doors and window ledges. Others jumped in to the street. They looked like great insects leaping into jets of flame. Then with a deafening crash the remaining side walls fell inward. The rear wall remained standing for a minute, then swayed and crashed backward upon the lower buildings behind, where at once fire broke out in a dozen places. To the friends it seemed as if the air suddenly filled with groans, with appeals, with cries that were like curses, like wails of spirits that had been denied all earthly happiness and by the greed of selfish man had now been consigned to endless torments in the other world, there to be subject to the furies' rage, to the ceaseless suffering that earth had begun and hell existed to perpetuate.

And oh, for your little child of the crush—into shapeless form of horror, so faithful to your charge, both going down together into that grave of fire, who shall deliver your eulogy, who shall rear your monument? For one among those who leaped into the street lived long enough to tell your story and to say that you ran back into the burning building to warn sleeping inmates and then was snatched away from the window, from the only place of possible rescue, by the very men and women wakened out of suffocating death. If there is reward or compensation in the world beyond, the good God has surely folded you into the vale of pleasure, into the paradise of childhood's playground, that eternity will provide. For you never knew what play meant here.

As the rear wall fell, crushing in the roofs of the smaller houses near and spreading the fire into the adjoining blocks David Barton gripped John Gordon's arm tight and exclaimed: "The wind is changing! Hope House will go next!"

They were on the corner next to Hope House, and the horror of the whole situation was suddenly intensified if possible by the danger which now threatened the one building in the whole ward that represented humanity at its best. The wind had changed to the east. The rain was increasing. It came down in a steady cold that had no effect on the fire except apparently to increase its fury. The awful confusion was increasing every moment. The alarm had been sent in for the entire department. In almost a second's time the mass of low wooden tenements that stood crowded together on both sides of Hope House was bursting with fire. The maddened, panic smitten people were carrying their goods out into the streets. Under the shapeless mass of hot bricks and twisted iron beams in Bowen street human forms could be seen—here a face staring up, here a hand, a foot, a trunk of formless horror. The whole pile seemed a writhing, tangled heap of human agony. Groans and cries burst from it that were appalling. The mass had fallen so near to the two men that some of the bricks lay at their feet. Before either realized what he was doing they were both digging at the ghastly mound, Hope House forgotten for the time being. Their hands were burned and torn by the hot bricks and splintered beams. Barton especially seemed inspired with unusual strength. He was drenched to the skin. His light overcoat was soon a mass of tattered rags. He was lifting a beam that lay across a figure that had moved a hand thrust out of the debris. Gordon was helping him.

"It's Mrs. Caylor!" Gordon exclaimed as the face of the figure appeared.

The woman was crushed into a sickening physical mass, but she was alive and conscious.

"It's Mr. Gordon, Mrs. Caylor!" said John, with a sob, as he tenderly wiped the face and with Barton's help lifted off the beam that had crushed her.

The woman gasped and spoke feebly, but clearly:

"Do you think I'll see Louie? He was a good boy—a good boy."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Caylor, and his body's straight now, and he's out of pain."

"A good boy. Yes, out of pain now," she murmured. Gordon and Barton lifted the form and carried it over to Hope House entrance. There was no need of words. No other place was possible. As yet the fire had not touched it. The crowd that surged through Bowen street had suddenly left everything else unsaved to protect Hope House. Miss Andrews was out by that mangled heap of torture and death, digging with her hands at the motionless pile, working with a man's energy and showing more than one man by her calm but determined courage.

But Hope House had suddenly come to mean more in a few seconds than it had meant in a dozen years to the people. That silent, pale, resolute, awfully patient woman who had been loving them resistlessly all these years, who was now over there digging at the living graves of the people, what of the place called her home, the center of her benignant influence? It should not perish. The people of Bowen street surrounded the place and fought death for a grim hour, aided by reenforcements of the department. In almost a dream of action Barton and Gordon had participated in this wild fury of defense. They first carried the body of Mrs. Caylor into the hall. As they laid it down both knew that what they laid down was a lifeless, shapeless heap of bones and flesh. She was with Louie now

On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden
Where the tree of life is blooming.

The men rushed out to the defense, and in that next hour Waterside district witnessed as heroic a struggle as any age of chivalry ever boasted. It was not an occasion for the department to dictate any rules or methods of procedure. The people made rules. They tore down buildings, flung themselves upon flaming fragments, stamped under foot and literally beat back the fury of the encircling fire. And Hope House was saved. When it was all over, the building stood blackened, defaced, scorched, but intact and into its archway came streaming a dark procession of forms bearing dreadful burdens, which were laid in straight rows through the hall and on the library floor. Before the gray dawn broke through the pall of smoke dripping with a drizzling air that penetrated even the warmly dressed early risers on the boulevards, there were forty-seven forms lying side by side on the floor of Hope House, and under the ghastly mound how many more no man dared to guess.

John Gordon found Miss Andrews still at work out by the ruins.

"You must stop and eat something," he said gently, but firmly. And as he spoke he laid his hand on her arm.

She was bearing on her face and person the marks of her desperate energy. But she had never ceased to be Grace Andrews, calm, self poised, patient, indomitable, but never hysterical or nervous.

A faint color appeared in her face, and she let Gordon bring her something to eat. She tasted it sitting on a beam near the ruins. The firemen, who knew her, never thought of refusing her a place with the workers. Through the dawn up into the increasing light of the awful day that revealed new horrors she worked on, and Gordon and Barton silently worked beside her.

The great excitement had kept Barton nerved up to the occasion. As the dawn broke, however, the strain was too severe for the frail tenement. He felt something snap somewhere, and his eyes blinded as he staggered over the ruins. He brushed back the hair that hung matted and dripping over his forehead and tried to steady himself. There was a child's arm protruding from a mass of plaster and bricks at which he had been working as in a nightmare, sobbing and coughing, and alternately cursing and praying. Gordon was several feet away, lifting a beam with Miss Andrews.

He straightened up and saw it all in a mist that darkened swiftly. Again he brushed his hand over his forehead and tried by all the exercise of his will to keep from falling, but the next moment he reeled, stumbled against a projecting timber and fell face downward. The fingers of the child, which had been moving slightly, touched his warm cheek. When John Gordon came over to lift Barton up, the child's arm encircled Barton's neck.

Gordon gently unclasped the arm and, lifting up his friend, carried him into Hope House. As he laid him down Barton opened his eyes and whispered, "Never mind me, save the others."

Gordon kneeled and kissed Barton's forehead, and, leaving him in charge of one of the residents, he went out to the work. When he and Miss Andrews had dug out the child, it had breathed its last. Miss Andrews kissed the disfigured face, and the first tear that Gordon had ever seen her shed fell on the body.

"One of our children in the kindergarten. Oh, my God! For this slaughter of the innocents who shall be counted guilty?"

She carried the child into the house, and when she came back there was an added divinity of righteous indignation in her blue eyes, added sadness in the lines of her patient face.

Day broke on Waterside district, Ward 18, over a scene that had never before been witnessed in any part of the city. There had been very many fires before this horror of tenement house fire, Ward 18. But no disaster had ever before been marked by such sickening slaughter of children. In No. 91, Mr. Marsh's double decker, twenty-nine children were burned or crushed to death. In the other blocks twenty-three more were victims of the falling wall or the night's exposure. Seventy-five families were instantly beggared, saving only the clothes they were, and left without a roof to shelter or a cent to pay for bread. Great piles of valueless furniture and bedding filled the streets and alleys, soaked by the rain which continued all day. Hope House stood solitary and alone, choked with the dead and the living, among whom Miss Andrews moved with an angel's pity and a commander's firmness. She was perfectly self possessed and knew just what to do next. Under her leadership order grew out of awful confusion, and Hope House, transformed into a hospital, knew at once that she who had been the gracious head of the settlement was also its director under the shadow of this fearful calamity.

Barton had been carried into one of the resident's rooms. When Gordon came in to see him after he had yielded to reenforcements sent in by the department, Barton was lying so pale and still that Gordon feared the end had come, but the great eyes opened in a moment, and Barton whispered:

"Take me up to my rooms, John. Williams is used to caring for me, and I am in the way here."

"In the way! Miss Andrews," Gordon spoke to her as she appeared at the door of the room, "is my friend Mr. Barton in the way here?"

"In the way! I feared you had passed on, Mr. Barton, when I saw you carried into the house by Mr. Gordon. You are not able to be moved. The exposure"—

"The exposure did me good!" Barton interrupted almost roughly. "Send for a carriage, John. I can go easily enough. I fainted out there. I'm not used to night work. They saved Hope House, Miss Andrews?"

"Yes, thank God," she said softly. Even with all the horrors of that night, and the awful sight out in the hall and library, she felt a thrill at the thought that the people had loved her a little.

"Get me out of here, John," Barton said again as Miss Andrews stepped back into the hall and resumed her work. "It's the beginning of the end, and I don't want it to come to me here."

Gordon did not remonstrate. Under other circumstances he might have done so. When he had first entered the room, he had partly closed the door, but the groans, the shrieks for mercy, the wails of friends discovering relatives in the piles of crushed humanity out on the floor, had swept into the room and Barton had shrunk down in the bed and shuddered. Gordon went out, closed the door and ordered a carriage for Barton. When it came, he went to help Barton get ready. To his amazement, he was up and waiting. When he got up off the bed on which he was sitting, he reeled on his feet and would have fallen if Gordon had not put an arm about him.

"You are not able to leave!"

"I am, I tell you! I will never die here. I'll live long enough to get to my rooms. And I'll live long enough to write up this horror too. The day of judgment ought to begin today for some of the people in this God forsaken metropolis, John. There's your friend, Mr. Marsh! I suppose the building was insured. He never lost anything, eh? Not that sort!"

Gordon supported him through the hall, and Barton, in spite of his tremendous will power, nearly fainted at the sights and sounds there. Miss Andrews was helping one of the surgeons. A great crowd thronged the entrance to Hope House, and Gordon had great difficulty in getting Barton out to the carriage.

He put him into it and was stepping in himself when Barton pulled the door and told the driver to go on.

Gordon hesitated.

"You're needed here. Go on, driver. I'll promise to live till tomorrow, John. Go in and help her. She needs some one."

The carriage started slowly on account of the crowd. Gordon waved a silent goodby. When the carriage was out of Bowen street, Barton fainted. He lay like a dead man in a corner of the carriage, and when the driver reached his rooms and got down to open the door he was frightened at the sight of what looked like a corpse in the carriage. He and Williams carried Barton in, and before noon Barton lay in a tremendous fever, which the doctor said was a clear case of pneumonia.

"Can't save him," the doctor said to Williams curtly. "I'll send up the best nurse we've got. But Barton might as well shoot himself as do what he did last night."

Down at Hope House all day John Gordon, Grace Andrews, the assistants and a score of surgeons worked to save life, with heart breaking doubt in their souls as they labored as to the future fate of the mangled, crushed, burned, maimed humanity that did not mercifully die. In the feverish horror of it all, as the work of searching the ruins went on and dense throngs of curiosity seekers choked all the district, John Gordon was aware of one prominent figure that was apparently omnipresent—Tommy Randall. He was on hand, cheerfully encouraging those who had lost everything, securing temporary quarters for those who were wandering bewildered through the streets or sitting dumb and stolid on their damaged piles of household goods, distributing wagon loads of bread and coffee and in several cases hunting up lost children and bringing together families that had become separated during the confusion.

Once as he stepped out of the hall for a moment to get a breath of fresh air Gordon almost ran into Randall, who had one child by the hand and another in his arms, both of them devouring sandwiches. Randall nodded to Gordon, but did not speak, and Gordon stepped back without saying anything. But all the rest of the day he had a vision of Tommy Randall and those children.

Both morning and evening papers contained full accounts of the "Tenement Fire Horror on Bowen Street." The News printed a list of names of property owners, and Philo H. Marsh's name was prominent among them as owner of the "double decker fire trap," as it was labeled. Every paper in the city had an editorial on the subject, but only one of them, the Index, called attention to the fact that for years the nature of the construction had been fully known and nothing done because city politics did not wish to interfere with property owners who paid a certain amount of blackmail for the privilege of ignoring city ordinances. A special meeting of the city council, called to consider the condition of the people in the ruined district, took action to provide temporary quarters for the homeless. Meanwhile public indignation cooled almost as fast as the ruins in Bowen street, when it was rumored that several prominent men and women had subscribed several thousand dollars to the survivors and that as one result of the fire a set of model tenement buildings would be built in the burned district. John Gordon, reading all this in moments when he rested from the great strain that continued for many days, could not repress a strong feeling that nothing but Christian grace kept from being bitter hatred of class that the real cause of all the horror had not been touched by all the editors and all the public excitement. The landlords were not arrested for anarchy in breaking ordinances which if obeyed would have made the massacre of children impossible. The professional politicians and spoilsmen continued to hold their places and plan for future plunder of the people. Tommy Randall, boss of Ward 18, was winning golden opinions from the sufferers by his lavish distribution of food and clothing and shelter. The disaster was a godsend to Tommy. How should the poor, ignorant, stolid people of Bowen street know that the bread and coffee and beer and clothing and coffins that Tommy Randall distributed with such cheerfulness and good will were bought with money which men like Mr. Marsh and Mr. Rufus Gordon had paid as part price for being let alone in their business methods?

How should the people know that Tommy Randall "touched" the pocket of every saloon keeper and every keeper of a disreputable house and every prominent criminal in Waterside district to get the sinews of political war? And what difference if he did, as Miss Andrews had so often told them? Wherever the money came from, it bought the things the people needed, and Tommy was the best friend they had. Flowers at christenings, turkeys during the holidays, jobs on the street force, a stand-in with the city hall—why, even Miss Andrews and Hope House had no such gifts for the people. To be sure Hope House was a good thing, and Miss Andrews was all right, but Tommy Randall was the people's friend, and "we'll never go back on Tommy" was the settled conviction of every man in the ward who owed his job to Tommy. Surely, O boss of Ward 18, you understand your business as well as if you were an angel of light. "Hats off to the ward boss," says the devil, as his best agents in corrupting the modern city file by in the great human review of the American city. The republic may have a president, but the municipality supports a king.

When Gordon went up to see Barton at the end of the most harrowing day he had ever known, he found his friend raving with fever. He did not know Gordon. The nurse was in charge with Williams, and all Gordon could do was to drop a tear on Barton's face as he kissed the burning forehead and exact a solemn promise from Williams to send for him at once whenever the end was near. Then back again to the days' experiences that aged him, but brought out all his reserve force—an

Two events in those three days stand out sharp and distinct in the life of John Gordon.

The first event was his deepening acquaintance with Grace Andrews. Working together side by side during those three days, they rapidly grew to respect and have confidence in each other. Grace Andrews amazed Gordon by her courage, her infinite patience, her profound pity for suffering, her endurance under circumstances so terrible that more than one of the men residents in the house fainted away at the sight of some of the bodies taken from the ruins. In several instances Gordon felt confident that Miss Andrews loved the dying back into life. She moved among them like an angel of God. At the most painful examinations, at the most critical operations, she was present, a benediction and a peace. More than once during those days Gordon found himself thinking of Grace Andrews in a way he had never yet thought. He had never given her credit for a sweet hearted tenderness, fascinating in its disclosure of an absolutely pure and gentle nature, feeling for all the woes of life. He had always admired her steadiness of purpose, her unterrified patience, her deep seriousness of motive. But he had never before witnessed her womanly sentiment, brought into prominence by this sudden stroke of suffering. It all added to the definition he was making of her. It all enriched his faith in her purpose and her sacrifices. In all this there was not a hint of anything sentimental on his own part. The awfulness of all those surroundings during that memorable week would have made any such thought impossible even if he had been other than he was, the farthest possible removed from susceptibility. The one impression that he received from a nearer view of her character was a conviction that she was a woman who had rare capability for loving and being loved, and he even went so far in his thinking as a result of this impression that he tried to imagine the character of the man who might possibly win such a great and affectionate nature.

The other event was an unexpected interview with Luella Marsh. The Rev. Paul Falmouth had come down to see Gordon and offer help of various kinds to Miss Andrews from his church young people's society. As he was getting ready to leave he said to Gordon: "It seems to me now is the time for Miss Andrews and you to bring pressure to bear on Mr. Marsh. While the horror is still keen and public sentiment is favorable you ought to persuade him to do something. He will probably rebuild. Do you know?"

"I don't know anything about it. Why has he not been down here?"

"Gordon"—Falmouth spoke with quiet earnestness—"do you know Mr. Marsh intimately? I understand your relation to the family. I believe I know his characteristics better than you do. At least I know this—he is morbidly sensitive in the matter of viewing human suffering. Do you suppose"—

Gordon's face darkened. Was it possible that any man would run away from duty like this? All his respect for Marsh and his feeling for him as the father of Luella were at once swept away by the thought of the man's contemptible cowardice. A tremendous tide of indignation took possession of him as he recalled Marsh's pitiable action at the time he visited the tenement. Would he deliberately shirk his responsibility in the matter of the fire and the opportunity now offered him to rebuild?

"I'll go and see him if you say so," Falmouth volunteered as he went away.

"I wish you would," Gordon replied. And he added in a tone that spoke of a personal passion that was nearer anger than any feeling he ever experienced: "If he doesn't come down here before night, I mean to go and see him myself. I want to know from his own lips the cause of his absence."

The day went by, and Mr. Marsh did not appear. That evening Gordon told Miss Andrews his intention. She made no comment of any kind. Gordon waited a moment and then asked a question:

"How far is Mr. Marsh responsible for all this suffering, for these deaths?"

"God will judge him, not I," she answered, her blue eyes filled with a light that more than once during the week Gordon had noticed as peculiar to her.

"I want to say the right thing to him. But I am afraid I shall lose my judgment in the matter," he said as he hesitated. Miss Andrews did not offer any suggestion, and Gordon at once went out and took the first car that made connections with uptown lines.

It was not until he stood on the familiar steps that he realized in some degree what he was about to do. The chance of meeting Luella was so small that he had not given it any thought. He had not seen her since his interview with her, and while he was heart hungry for the kind of love that was being denied him, the experiences through which he had been since going to Hope House, the appalling character of the disaster for which Luella's father was at least in large part responsible, for the time being obscured his personal affairs. It can truly be said that as he gave his name to the servant and asked to see Mr. Marsh he was nerving himself for the interview, with Luella in second place at least.

He went into the hall reception room and had only just sat down when Luella entered. He rose and faced her and saw at once that some mistake had been made by the servant. Luella was deeply agitated. She was hardly able to say:

"I was told a visitor wished to see me"—

"I called to see Mr. Marsh," said Gordon quietly, but his pulses were beating high.

For a moment they stood looking at each other and each noted something even under the stress of the situation.

John saw that the proud attitude was marked by a sadness that had left its mark on a beautiful face so clearly that he said to himself, "She loves me still!" Luella noted in her former lover an added dignity and nobility and said to herself, "He is a man; not a store model like Penrose!" And there were two hearts beating high in the short silence.

"Father is not at home. He is out of the city," she managed to say, but her lips trembled in spite of all her efforts.

Gordon took a step toward the hall.

"May I ask when he went away?"

"I believe he left three days ago."

"The morning after the fire around Hope House?"

"Yes."

There was another silence. Gordon's mind went into a tumult.

"May I ask when he expects to return?"

"I think tomorrow or the next day." She was recovering her equanimity, but she resented his questions.

"Will you kindly ask him to come down to Hope House and see me on a matter of business when he returns?"

"Will you state the business?" She put the question as coldly as he had put his.

"Certainly." Passion had the reins now and was lashing him hard. "Please tell your father I want to ask him how far he considers himself responsible for the murder of over sixty children and the maiming of a score more on account of the illegal tenement he constructed on Bowen street." It was the severest thing he had ever said to Luella, but his excuse was found in the agony that filled Hope House at that minute.

"Murder, did you say?" Luella's eyes blazed. She stepped toward John Gordon and confronted him defiantly. "Do you realize what you are saying?"

"Do I? Oh, Luella, if you had seen what I have seen during the last three days"— Gordon broke down so suddenly that Luella was overwhelmingly embarrassed. It was no secret with her heart that the man had her love; at least she was wretched without him, even if she was not yet willing to live with him where he chose to live. To see him sitting there now, with his face covered, smote her proud nature so hard that in a moment she would have been kneeling beside him and promising to go with him anywhere, to leave every social pleasure she prized, for the love of his heart.

But how should John Gordon know anything of all that? When he looked up he saw her standing very still and very white, staring at him in a questioning way. And in an almost matter of fact tone he began to relate the facts about Mr. Marsh's relation to the disaster. He told the facts in quite a dispassionate manner. In reality he was exercising a great repression. And he noticed as he drew near the end that Luella was listening like one who was being told certain things for the first time.

"I never knew that father owned any property on Bowen street," she said in a low voice when Gordon stopped.

John Gordon rose. His heart was sore over everything connected with Mr. Marsh's conduct. He had not a single excuse to offer for him.

"Do you believe me?" Luella cried with her old spirit flaming up.

"I have no reason to disbelieve you. You are not to blame for your father's guilt."

"It is a great grief to me," she said simply. "Over sixty children! I could not read the details of the—the—disaster. Father took the paper out of my hands that morning. It made me sick, and—and—you know how sensitive father has always been at the sight of suffering. He could not bear to hear of it or look at it. I am made in the same way. It is all too horrible."

"If it is horrible to look at, what do you think it is to feel it?" John Gordon asked grimly. And as he asked the question Grace Andrews' face, with its tender, deep blue eyes, flashed up before him, and for the first time in his life he compared her with Luella, simply in the matter of capability to bear the sins and sorrows of humanity.

Luella looked at him gravely and shook her head. And then John Gordon rose.

"You are not going?" she said before she realized. And then the color flooded her face, and she stood, proud woman as she was, with bowed head, as conscious as a girl who has made some little social mistake.

Again if John Gordon had said, "Luella, I will never go from you if you will ask me to remain!" she would have given her whole life into his keeping and followed him to the earth's end for the love of him. But how was he to know all that? All he saw was a woman who quickly recovered from a momentary confusion, and he said: "You must excuse me; I came to see your father. I am very anxious to see him and shall be under obligations to you if he can come down to Hope House as soon as he returns."

He turned and walked out into the hall, where he turned again toward her and gravely bowed.

"Good evening," he said coldly. He said it coldly because his heart was beating so fiercely that he was afraid to betray his emotions. She did not say a word, only looked at him as he slowly walked to the door. As he opened it she said in a whisper, "John!"

He never heard. Is love then both blind and deaf? Yea; it is sometimes, when the lovers are both high spirited, strongly individual and sensitive. And, alas for John Gordon, he neither saw nor heard, and walked out into the night, wretched at heart and cast down in his emotions. When he was gone, Luella laid her head again on her arms, and when Mr. Penrose a little later sent in his card she excused herself from seeing him owing to illness. It was the world old illness, which love creates when it is baffled, buffeted, dishonored or misunderstood.

John Gordon had not been back to Hope House ten minutes when Williams called him up and said that Barton was conscious and had called for his friend. Gordon at once went out and was soon by Barton's side.

The nurse and doctor and Harris were there and Gordon knew that Barton's hour had come. The first word that Barton spoke was a request that he be permitted to talk to Gordon alone.

The others went into the next room, and Gordon kneeled and put his hand on that of his friend.

"John," Barton whispered in his old whimsical manner, "the old cough is like a daily paper, it has the last word. No use to reply or explain. The editor can get back at you in the next number. 'I'm done for,' as the pancake said when it was turned over."

He stopped and with great effort raised up a little. Gordon supported him.

"There, I feel a little easier. I never wanted to die lying down. What I wanted to say, John, there are two letters, love letters, John, from the old lady Ellingham you remember. They are in my desk. Read them when I am gone. The second one only came this morning. I don't know what is in it. Bat you—open—and read it."

Gordon was crying. He could not keep back the tears of affection. His love for Barton was almost like that of the love between man and woman.

"Don't cry, John. What's the difference? There's one thing—I hope—you and Luella—the cough's going to get me. Don't let people look at me. I'm not a handsome man as I used to be. There's one thing"—

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 the letter with glistening eyes.

JOHN GORDON was reading the two letters that David Barton had received from the old lady, Mrs. Captain George Ellingham. 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 Miss 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. Ellingham 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.

My grandson has recovered his health 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 anyhow and to 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 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 desire 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 hardest? 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 hope 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.

Mr. David Barton:

My Dear Friend—I hasten at once to answer your reply to my letter, for your words assure me 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 Miss Andrews, and I believe in what she is doing. 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 that I don't care what is done 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 makes 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 Miss Andrews. The Lord bless you, sir, and may he meet you himself as you pass over. With respect and affection, your friend,

MRS. CAPT. GEORGE EFFINGHAM.

John Gordon reread this letter with glistening eyes. The hand of David Barton seemed to reach out of 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 spicy 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 afire. 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 that are unnecessary in one day than it gives to feed starved childhood in a year. If boys were born on the