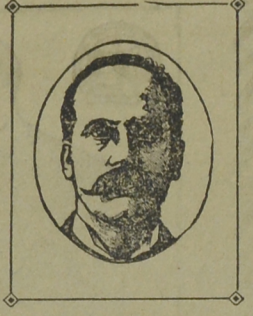


The REFORMER

By CHARLES M. SHELDON.
Author of "In His Steps," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," Etc.

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(CONTINUED).

John Gordon sat still, looking at the man in wonderment mingled with indignation. That a business man with the reputation of Mr. Marsh could actually be guilty of such indifference and neglect was almost beyond belief. It was not until other events threw light on the subject that Gordon fully understood the shrinking that Mr. Marsh had from contact with any form of human degradation and misery.

As John Gordon remained silent Mr. Marsh uttered a short laugh and said uneasily:

"I don't wonder you think it very queer that I have never been down there. Of course I have trusted Davis implicitly. At the same time I have of necessity been ignorant of conditions. You regard them as bad?"

"Bad! They are simply beyond any description. It is useless for me to attempt it, Mr. Marsh." Gordon spoke with tremendous earnestness, for there was one word that Marsh had dropped that gave him hope. "You said it did not sound very humane to say you had never seen that property. Will you go with me and look at it? I cannot tell you the facts. If I were to give them to you as they are, I am actually afraid you would not believe me. There are thousands of business men in this city who do not know the horrors that are congested in and around Bowen street and Long avenue and High lane. But if you have any heart in you you cannot be unmoved by the sight down there. In the name of the suffering babies and little children I beg of you, Mr. Marsh, come with me and see with your own eyes. You lost a little child once, Mr. Marsh. I remember Luella telling me, your first-born son. In the name of that sacred memory will you take an interest in the dying innocent children in your own tenements?"

In his sudden appeal to this long distant but never forgotten experience John Gordon made the one plea that perhaps could have moved Philo Marsh sufficiently to overcome his repugnance to every form of human suffering. He remained silent a moment; then, lifting his eyes to Gordon, he said gravely:

"Very well, I'll go with you. When shall we go?"

"I will suit my time to your convenience. I would like to have you note the conditions by day and night. I can go with you any time."

"Say tomorrow afternoon and night, then."

"Will you take dinner with Miss Andrews at Hope House?" John Gordon ventured to say.

Mr. Marsh hesitated. "Why, yes, I will if it is customary."

"I know Miss Andrews will welcome you. Tomorrow at 2, if that will suit you, I will meet you here, and we can inspect the tenements, take dinner at 6 and go out again for a look at night. Thank you."

John Gordon spoke with quiet but deep satisfaction. He had scored an important point. How important he did not know, but it was a vital beginning to any influence he might hope to exert over the property owners.

As he started to go out, Mr. Marsh spoke slowly:

"About Luella? There is no prospect of an agreement between you?"

"Not any that I can see."

"I'm sorry." The words were genuine, and John Gordon was touched by them.

"Thank you, Mr. Marsh!" He shook hands firmly and went out with a tear in his eye, but it was not the same as that which the interview with his own father had provoked.

"Thank God! He seems to have a heart, at least!" John Gordon exclaimed as he went down into his Gehenna again.

Between 2 and 3 o'clock the next day Mr. Marsh and John Gordon were in Bowen street and standing in front of the building on lot 91, known as the "dumbbell tenement," which, according to one famous tenement house commission, "is the one hopeless form of tenement construction. It cannot be well ventilated; it cannot be well lighted; it is not safe in case of fire; direct light is only possible for the rooms at front and rear. The middle rooms must borrow what light they can from dark hallways, the shallow shafts and the rear rooms. Their air must pass through other rooms or tiny shafts, and

cannot but be contaminated before it reaches them." (New York tenement commission, 1894.)

John Gordon could not help noticing the shrinking manner of Mr. Marsh. The man seemed to be under an influence that could not be fear or even compassion. It was rather a mingling of disgust and physical dread.

"Shall we go in?" John Gordon said, looking at his companion curiously.

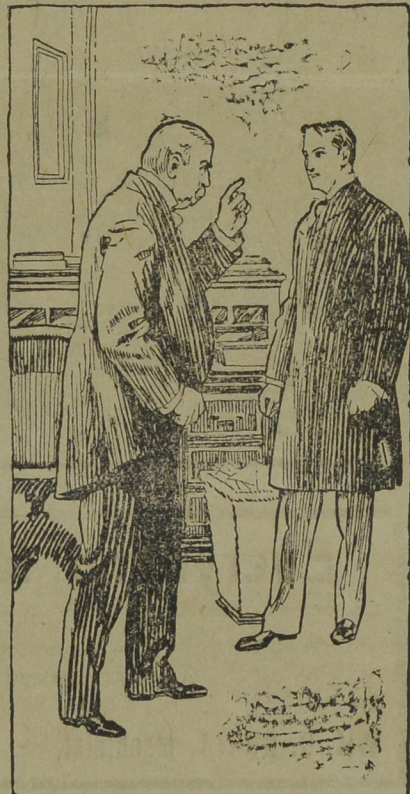
"Wait a moment," cried Marsh. "I want to look at the street."

The two men stood still, and the older for the first time in his life saw a sight that he had never dreamed could exist in a civilized city that was at least nominally Christian.

It would be impossible to picture Bowen street by means of a photograph. No skill of the photographer or artist could reproduce the scene, and human language is as weak as the brush or camera to tell the story.

The street swarmed with children. It was midsummer and the day itself was hot, but not one of the hottest of the season. There was not a tree or shrub or flower, not a bit of grass, not even a weed to relieve the dull, sickening look of sun smitten brick and wood and stone.

In front of every other house stood a garbage box, or what had once been one. The majority of these boxes were rotting heaps of boards without covers, overflowing with wet stuff composed of decaying vegetables, the sweepings from the tables of the people and the litter of paper, tin cans and refuse that had not been disturbed by inspectors or garbage wagons for several weeks. There was not a whole piece of sidewalk on either side of the street. Pieces of rotting plank stood on end or lay partly over the alleys, in some cases thrust down between the decaying timbers, sticking above the regular level, a hideous menace, a miserable object lesson, out of hundreds more, of the mournful fact of municipal incompetence.



"It is none of your business!"

tency and debauchery of machine politics. Mr. Marsh learned afterward that more than 1,500 suits were pending against the city for serious injuries due to the defective sidewalks and that the sum total of damages claimed was more than \$22,500,000. (See proceedings of regular meeting of Chicago city council Jan. 8, 1900.) The children in the street were playing, quarreling, digging in the garbage boxes, in many instances picking bits of decayed lemons, bananas and oranges out of the gutter.

One group of boys was tormenting a miserable cat. Another group was yelling at a police officer who had just ordered them out of the street, where they had been trying to have a game of ball. Over the steps of the tenement entrances, some of them high enough to be designated "stoops," women holding sick babies or little girls staggering under the load of a child two or three years younger filled up the picture of sordid, unkempt, disheveled, tired out humanity that turned that awful street into a human hell, where no alleviating bit of cheer or relief was inserted to give one ray of hope for the future.

The only buildings in front of which

there were no steps were the saloons. These averaged five to a block and one on each corner. The corner saloons, with a few exceptions, also had attached to them vaudeville halls, with staring lamp signs, "Free Vaudeville," hung out over the entrances.

It has been said that no living being ever successfully described Bowen street so that a person who never saw it could have even the faintest conception of its truth. Mr. Marsh had never seen anything like it, and all his reading had never given him any idea whatever of the reality. He stared at it all now in a bewildered, almost frightened manner that grasped only a part of the terrible significance of it all.

Finally he turned to John Gordon and said with a tone in which irritation was the dominant note:

"Why don't some of these children go over and play in the Hope House playgrounds instead of rolling in this awful filth? I understood you to say that Hope House had a playground."

John Gordon looked at Mr. Marsh at first with a feeling of indignation, which rapidly changed to one of sadness.

"How many children can play in a space shut in and bounded by a lot less than 50 feet wide and 100 feet long? It is crowded to overflowing now. Do you know how many years Miss Andrews pleaded and begged and prayed and turned mountains of selfish indifference and commercial greed to get that little playground?"

"I have no idea. Hadn't we better go inside now?" Mr. Marsh replied feebly. "Let's get through with it. I had no idea it was all so horrible. Of course this is unusually bad, isn't it?"

"There are fifty other streets as bad or worse within two miles of Hope House."

"Why don't they get new garbage boxes at least?" Mr. Marsh exclaimed in the same irritated manner. He had begun by being sick at the sight of the fearful conditions. He was now growing angry.

"Who do you mean by 'they,' Mr. Marsh?" John Gordon said, with some bitterness. "The landlords? The city ordinance makes it obligatory on the landlords to furnish and keep in good repair garbage boxes sufficient in size to accommodate the number of families in their tenements."

Mr. Marsh looked at the box in front of his own double decker and said nothing.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Liked the Cure.

He—I offered to kiss her tears away. She—Well?

He—She cried worse than ever.

Some men's respect for themselves seems to be based largely on a lack of unbiased information.—Puck.

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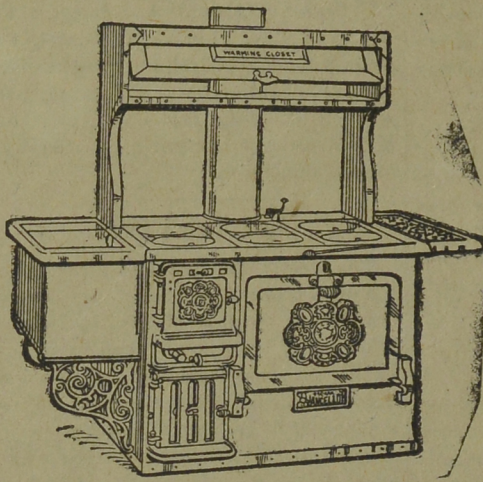
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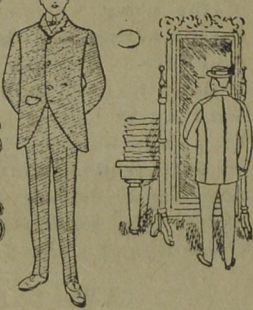
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