

THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG.

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a little. "Better trim your wings, Sarah; they're dragging on the floor."

He hunted up his hat, which was one of the things Philip could never find twice in the same place, kissed his wife and went out to make the visit at the mill which he was getting ready to make when Mr. Winter called.

To his surprise, when he went down through the business part of the town, he discovered that his sermon of Sunday had roused almost every one. People were talking about it on the street—an almost unheard of thing in Milton. When the evening paper came out, it described in sensational paragraphs the Rev. Mr. Strong's attack on the wealthy sinners of his own church and went on to say that the church "was very much wrought up over the sermon and would probably make it uncomfortable for the reverend gentleman." Philip wondered, as he read, at the unusual stir made because a preacher of Christ had denounced an undoubted evil.

"Is it, then," he asked himself, "such a remarkable piece of news that a minister of the gospel has preached from his own pulpit against what is without question an un-Christian use of property? What is the meaning of the church in society unless it is just that? Is it possible that the public is so little accustomed to hear anything on this subject that when they do hear it it is in the nature of sensational news?"

He pondered over these questions as he quietly but rapidly went along with his work. He was conscious as the days went on that trouble was brewing for him. This hurt him in a way hard to explain, but his sensitive spirit felt the cut like a lash on a sore place.

When Sunday came, he went into his pulpit and faced the largest audience he had yet seen in Calvary church. As is often the case, people who had heard of his previous sermon on Sunday thought he would preach another like it again. Instead of that he preached a sermon on the love of God for the world. In one way the large audience was disappointed. It had come to have its love of sensation fed, and Philip had not given it anything of the kind. In another way it was profoundly moved by the power and sweetness of Philip's unfolding of the great subject. Men who had not been inside of a church for years went away thoughtfully impressed with the old truth of God's love and asked themselves what they had done to deserve it—the very thing that Philip wanted them to ask. The property owners in the church who had felt offended by Philip's sermon of the Sunday before went away from the service acknowledging that the new pastor was an eloquent preacher and a man of large gifts. In the evening Philip preached again from the same theme, using it in an entirely different way. His audience nearly filled the church and was evidently deeply impressed.

In spite of all this Philip felt a certain element in the church had arrayed itself against him. Mr. Winter did not appear at either service. There were certain other absences on the part of men who had been constant attendants on the Sunday services. He felt, without hearing it, that a great deal was being said in opposition to him; but, with the burden of it beginning to wear a little on him, he saw nothing better to do than to go on with his work as if nothing unusual had taken place.

CHAPTER IV.

Pursuing the plan he had originally mapped out when he came to Milton, he spent much of his time in the afternoons studying the social and civic life of the town. As the first Sunday of the next month drew near, when he was to speak again on the attitude of Christ to some aspect of modern society, he determined to select the saloon as one of the prominent features of modern life that would naturally be noticed by Christ and denounced by him as a great evil.

In his study of the saloon question he did a thing which he had never done before, and then only after very much deliberation and prayer. He went into the saloons themselves on different occasions. He had never done such a thing before. He wanted to know from actual knowledge what sort of places the saloons were. What he saw after a dozen visits to as many different groceries added fuel to the flame of indignation that burned already hot in him. The sight of the vast army of men turning into beasts in these dens created in him a loathing and a hatred of the whole iniquitous institution that language failed to express. He wondered with unspeakable astonishment in his soul that a civilized community in the nineteenth century would tolerate for one moment the public sale of an article that led, on the confession of society itself, to countless crimes against the law of the land and of God. His indignant astonishment deepened yet more, if that were possible, when he found that the license of \$500 a year for each saloon was used by the town to support the public school system. That, to Philip's mind, was an awful sarcasm on Christian civilization. It seemed to him like selling a man poison according to law and then taking the money from the sale to help the widow to purchase mourning. It

was still as glibly as that would be.

He went to see some of the other ministers, hoping to unite them in a combined attack on the saloon power. It seemed to him that if the church as a whole entered the crusade against the saloon it could be driven out even from Milton, where it had been so long established. To his surprise, he found the other churches unwilling to unite in a public battle against whisky men. Several of the ministers openly defended license as the only practicable method of dealing with the saloon. All of them confessed it was evil, and only evil, but under the circumstances thought it would do little good to agitate the subject. Philip came away from several interviews with the ministers sad and sick at heart.

He approached several of the prominent men in the town, hoping to enlist some of them in the fight against the rum power. Here he met with an unexpected opposition, coming in a form he had not anticipated. One prominent citizen said:

"Mr. Strong, you will ruin your chances here if you attack the saloons in this savage manner, and I'll tell you why: The whisky men hold a tremendous influence in Milton in the matter of political power. The city election comes off the middle of next month. The men up for office are dependent for election on the votes of the saloon men and their following. You will cut your head off sure if you come out against them in public. Why, there's Mr. — and so on (he named half a dozen men) in your church who are up for office in the coming election. They can't be elected without the votes of the rummies, and they know it. Better steer clear of it, Mr. Strong. The saloon has been a regular thing in Milton for over 50 years. It is as much a part of the town as the churches or schools, and I tell you it is a power!"

"What!" cried Philip, in unbounded astonishment, "do you tell me, you, a leading citizen of this town of 50,000 infinite souls, that the saloon power has its grip to this extent on the civic and social life of the place, and you are willing to sit down and let this devil of crime and ruin throttle you and not raise a finger to expel the monster? Is it possible? It is not in Christian America that such a state of affairs in our political life should be endured."

"Nevertheless," replied the business man, "these are the facts. And you will simply dash your own life out against a wall of solid rock if you try to fight this evil. You have my warning."

"May I not also have your help?" cried Philip, hungry for soul for companionship in the struggle which he saw was coming.

"It would ruin my business to come out against the saloon," replied the man frankly.

"And what is that?" cried Philip earnestly. "It has already ruined far more than ought to be dear to you. Man, man, what are money and business compared with your own flesh and blood? Do you know where your own son was two nights ago? In one of the vilest of the vile holes in this city, which you, a father, license to another man to destroy the life of your own child! I saw him there myself, and my heart ached for him and you. It is the necessary truth. Will you not join with me to wipe out this curse in society?"

The merchant trembled, and his lips quivered at mention of his son, but he replied:

"I cannot do what you want, Mr. Strong, but you can count on my sympathy if you make the fight." Philip finally went away, his soul tossed on a wave of mountain proportions and growing more and more crested with foam and wrath as the first Sunday of the month drew near and he realized that the battle was one that he must wage single handed in a town of 50,000 people.

He was not so destitute of support as he thought. There were many mothers' hearts in Milton that had ached and prayed in agony long years that the Almighty would come with his power and sweep the curse away. But Philip had not been long enough in Milton to know the entire sentiment of the people. He had so far touched only the church through its representative pulpits and a few of the leading business men, and the result had been almost to convince him that very little help could be expected from the public generally. He was appalled to find out what a tremendous hold the whisky men had on the business and politics of the place. It was a revelation to him of their power. The whole thing seemed to him like a travesty of free government and a terrible commentary on the boasted Christianity of the century.

So when he walked into the pulpit the first Sunday of the month he felt his message burning in his heart and on his lips as never before. It seemed beyond all question that if Christ was pastor of Calvary church he would speak out in plain denunciation of the whisky power. And so, after the opening part of the service, Philip rose to speak, facing an immense audience that overflowed the galleries and invaded the choir and even sat upon the pulpit platform. Such a crowd had

never been seen in Calvary church before.

Philip had not announced his subject, but there was an expectation on the part of many that he was going to denounce the saloon. In the two months that he had been preaching in Milton he had attracted great attention. His audience this morning represented a great many different kinds of people. Some came out of curiosity. Others came because the crowd was going that way. So it happened that Philip faced a truly representative audience of Milton people. As his eye swept over the house he saw four of the six members of his church who were up for office at the coming election in two weeks.

For an hour Philip spoke as he had never spoken in all his life before. His subject, the cause it represented, the immense audience, the entire occasion caught him up in a genuine burst of eloquent fury, and his sermon swept through the house like a prairie fire driven by a high gale. At the close he spoke of the power of the church compared with the saloon and showed how easily it could win the victory against any kind of evil if it were only united and determined.

"Men and women of Milton, fathers, mothers and citizens," he said, "this evil is one which cannot be driven out unless the Christian people of this place unite to condemn it and fight it regardless of results. It is too firmly established. It has its clutch on business, the municipal life, and even the church itself. It is a fact that the churches in Milton have been afraid to take the right stand in this matter. Members of the churches have become involved in the terrible entanglement of the long established rum power, until today you witness a condition of affairs which ought to stir the righteous indignation of every citizen and father. What is it you are enduring? An institution which blasts with its poisonous breath every soul that enters it, which ruins young manhood, which kills more citizens in times of peace than the most bloody war ever slew in times of revolution; an institution that is established for the open and declared purpose of getting money from the people by the sale of stuff that creates criminals; an institution that robs the honest workman of his savings and looks with indifference on the tears of the wife, the sobs of the mother; an institution that never gives one cent of its enormous wealth to build churches, colleges or homes for the needy; an institution that has the brand of the murderer, the harlot, the gambler burned into it with a brand of the devil's own forging in the furnace of his hottest hell. This institution so rules and governs this town of Milton today that honest citizens tremble before it, business men dare not oppose it for fear of losing money, church members fawn before it in order to gain place in politics, and ministers of the gospel confront its hideous influence and say nothing! It is high time we faced this monster of iniquity and drove it out of the stronghold it has occupied so long."

"I wish you could have gone with me this past week and witnessed some of the sights I have seen. No! I retract that statement. I would not wish that any father or mother had had the heartache that I have felt as I contemplated the ruins of young lives crumbling into the decay of premature debility, mocking the manhood that God gave them in the intoxicating course of debauchery. What have I seen? O ye fathers! O ye mothers! Do you know what is going on in this place of 60 saloons licensed by your own act and made legal by your own will? You, madam, and you, sir, who have covenanted together in the fellowship and discipleship of the purest institution of God on earth, who have sat here in front of this pulpit and partaken of the emblems which remind you of your Redeemer, where are your sons, your brothers, your lovers, your friends? They are not here this morning. The church does not have any hold on them. They are growing up to disregard the duties of good citizenship. They are walking down the broad avenue of destruction, and what is this town doing to prevent it? I have seen young men from what are called the best homes in this town reel in and out of gilded temples of evil, oaths on their lips and passion in their looks, and the cry of my soul has gone up to Almighty God that the church and the home might combine their mighty force to drive the whisky demon out of our municipal life so that we might feel the curse of it again never more."

"I speak to you today in the name of my Lord and Master. It is impossible for me to believe that if that Christ of God were standing here this morning he would advise the licensing of this corruption as the most feasible or expedient method of dealing with it. I cannot imagine him using the argument that the saloon must be licensed for the revenue that may be gained from it to support the school system. I cannot imagine Christ taking any other position before the whisky power than that of uncompromising condemnation. He would say it was evil and only evil and therefore to be opposed by every legal and moral restriction that society could rear against it. In his name, speaking as I believe he would speak if he were here this moment, I solemnly declare the necessity on the part of every disciple of Christ in every church in Milton of placing himself decidedly and persistently and at once in open battle against the saloon until it is destroyed, until its power in business, politics and society is a thing of the past, until we have rid ourselves of the foul viper which has so many years trailed its slimy folds through our homes and our schools.

"Citizens, Christians, church members, I call on you today to take up arms against the common foe of that we hold dear in church, home and

state. I know there are honest business men who have long writhed in secret at the ignominy of the halter about their necks by which they have been led. There are citizens who have the best interests of the community at heart who have hung their heads in shame of American politics, seeing this brutal whisky element dictating the government of the towns and parceling out their patronage and managing their funds and enormous stealings of the people's money. I know there are church members who have felt in their hearts the deep shame of bowing the knee to this rum god in order to make advancement in political life. And I call on all these today to rise with me and begin a fight against the entire saloon business and whisky rule in Milton until by the help of the Lord of Hosts we have got us the victory. Men, women, brothers, sisters in the great family of God on earth, will you sit tamely down and worship the great beast of this country? Will you not rather gird your swords upon your thighs and go out to battle against this blasphemous Phylistine who has defied the armies of the living God? I have spoken my message. Let us ask the wisdom and power of the Divine to help us."

Philip's prayer was almost painful in its intensity of feeling and expression. The audience sat in deathly silence, and when he pronounced the amen of the benediction it was several moments before any one stirred to leave the church.

Philip went home completely exhausted. He had put into his sermon all of himself and had called up all his reserve power—a thing he was not often guilty of doing and for which he condemned himself on this occasion. But it was past, and he could not recall it. He was not concerned as to the results of his sermon. He had long believed that if he spoke the message God gave him he was not to grow anxious over the outcome of it.

But the people of Milton were deeply stirred by the address. They were not in the habit of hearing that kind of preaching. And what was more, the whisky element was roused. It was not in the habit of having its authority attacked in that bold, almost savage manner. For years its sway had been undisturbed. It had insolently established itself in power until even those citizens who knew its thoroughly evil character were deceived into the belief that nothing better than licensing it was possible. The idea that the saloon could be banished, removed, driven out altogether, had never before been advocated in Milton. The conviction that whether it could be it ought to be suppressed had never gained ground with any number of people. They had endured it as a necessary evil. Philip's sermon, therefore, fell something like a bomb into the whisky camp. Before night the report of the sermon had spread all over the town. The saloon men were enraged. Ordinarily they would have paid no attention to anything a church or a preacher might say or do. But Philip spoke from the pulpit of the largest church in Milton. The whisky men knew that if the large churches should all unite to fight them they would make it very uncomfortable for them and in the end probably drive them out. Philip went home that Sunday night after the evening service with several bitter enemies. The whisky men contributed one element. Some



This time Philip fell.

of his own church members made up another. He had struck again at the same sore spot which had wounded the month before. In his attack on the saloon as an institution he had again necessarily condemned all those members of his church who rented property to the whisky element. Again, as a month ago, these property holders went from the hearing of the sermon angry that they as well as the saloon power were under indictment.

As Philip entered on the week's work after that eventful sermon he began to feel the pressure of public feeling against him. He began to realize the bitterness of championing a just cause alone. He felt the burden of the community's sin in the matter, and more than once he felt obliged to come in from his parish work and go up into his study, there to commune with his Father. He was growing old very fast in these first few weeks in his new parish.

Tuesday evening of that week Philip had been writing a little while in his study, where he had gone immediately after supper. It was nearly 8 o'clock when he happened to remember that he had promised a sick child in the home of one of his parishioners that he would come and see him that very day.

He came down stairs, put on his hat and overcoat and told his wife where he was going.

"It's not far. I shall be back in about half an hour, Sarah."

He went out, and his wife held the door open until he was down the steps.

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