

THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG.

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Philip opened the kitchen door and inquired of the servant, who sat there reading, where his wife was.

"I think she went up stairs a little while ago," was the reply.

Philip went at once up stairs into his study and to his alarm found that his wife had fainted. She lay on the floor in front of his desk. As Philip stooped to raise her he noticed two pieces of paper, one of them addressed to "The Preacher" and the other to "The Preacher's Wife." They were anonymous scrawls, threatening the lives of the minister and his wife. On his desk, driven deep into the wood, was a large knife. Then said Philip with a prayer, "Verily an enemy hath done this."

CHAPTER VII.

The anonymous letters, or rather scrawls, which Philip found by the side of his unconscious wife as he stooped to raise her up read as follows:

Preacher—Better pack up and leave. Milton is not big enough to hold you alive. Take warning in time.

Preacher's Wife—As long as you stay in Milton there is danger of two funerals. Dynamite kills women as well as men.

Philip sat by the study lounge holding these scrawls in his hand as his wife recovered from her fainting fit after he had applied restoratives. His heart was filled with horror at the thought of the complete cowardice which could threaten the life of an innocent woman. There was with it a feeling of intense contempt of such childish, dime novel methods of intimidation as that of sticking a knife into the study desk. If it had not been for its effect on his wife, Philip would have laughed at the whole thing. As it was, he was surprised and alarmed that she had fainted, a thing he had never known her to do, and as soon as she was able to speak he listened anxiously to her story.

"It must have been an hour after you had gone, Philip, that I thought I heard a noise up stairs, and, thinking perhaps you had left one of your windows down at the top and the curtain was flapping, I went right up, and the minute I stepped into the room I had the feeling that some one was there."

"Didn't you carry up a light?"

"No. The lamp was burning at the end of the upper hall, and so I never thought of needing more. Well, as I moved over toward the window, still feeling that strange, unaccountable knowledge of some one there, a man stepped out from behind your desk, walked right up to me and held out those letters in one hand, while with the other he threw the light from a candle bull's eye or burglar's lantern into them."

Newing's listened in amazement.

"You must have dreamed all that."

"It isn't likely that any man do such a thing."

"Philip, I did not dream. I was terribly wide awake and so scared that I couldn't even scream. My tongue seemed to be entirely useless. But I felt compelled to read what was written, and the man held the papers there until the words seemed to burn my eyes. He then walked over to the desk and with one blow drove the knife down into the wood, and then I fainted away, and that is all I can remember."

"And what became of the man?" asked Philip, still inclined to think that his wife had in some way fallen asleep and dreamed at least a part of this strange scene, perhaps before she went up to the study and discovered the letters. "I don't know; maybe he is in the house yet. Philip, I am almost dead for fear—not for myself, but for your life."

"I never had any fear of anonymous letters or of threats," replied Philip, contemptuously eyeing the knife, which was still sticking in the desk. "Evidently the saloon men think I am a child to be frightened with these bugaboos, which have figured in every sensational story since the time of Captain Kidd."

"Then you think this is the work of the saloon men?"

"Who else can it be? We have no other enemies of this sort in Milton."

"But they will kill you. Oh, Philip, I cannot bear the thought of living here in this way! Let us leave this dreadful place."

"Little woman," said Philip, while he bravely drove away any slight anxiety he may have had for himself, "don't you think it would be cowardly to run away so soon?"

"Wouldn't it be better to run away so soon than to be killed? Is there any bravery in staying in a place where you are likely to be murdered by some coward?"

"I don't think I shall be," said Philip confidently. "And I don't want you to be afraid. They will not dare to harm you."

"No, Philip!" exclaimed his wife eagerly; "you must not be mistaken. I did not faint away tonight because I was afraid for myself. Surely I have no fear there. It was the thought of the peril in which you stand daily as you go out among these men, and as you go back and forth to your meetings in the dark. I am growing nervous and anxious ever since the shooting, and when I was startled by the man here tonight I was so weak that I fainted. But I am sure that they do not care to harm me; you are the object of their hatred. If they strike me

one it will be you. That is the reason I want to leave this place. Say you will, Philip. Surely there are other churches where you could preach as you want to and still not be in such constant danger."

It required all of Philip's wisdom and love and consciousness of his immediate duty to answer his wife's appeal and say no to it. It was one of the severest struggles he ever had. There was to be taken into the account not only his own safety, but that of his wife as well. For, think what he would, he could not shake off the feeling that a man so cowardly as to resort to the assassination of a man would not be overparticular even if it should chance to be a woman. Philip was man enough to be entirely unshaken by anonymous threats. A thousand a day would not have unnerved him in the least. He would have writhed under the sense of the great sin which they revealed, but that is all the effect they would have had.

When it came to his wife, however, that was another question. For a moment he felt like sending in his resignation and moving out of Milton as soon as possible. Mrs. Strong did not oppose his decision when once he had declared his resolve. She knew Philip must do what to him was the will of his Master, and with that finally she was content.

She had overcome her nervousness and dread now that Philip's courageous presence strengthened her, and she began to tell him that he had better hunt for the man who had appeared so mysteriously in the study.

"I haven't convinced myself yet that there is any man. Confess, Sarah, that you dreamed all that."

"I did not," replied his wife, a little indignantly. "Do you think I wrote those letters and stuck that knife into the desk myself?"

"Of course not. But how could a man get into the study and neither you nor the girl know it?"

"I did hear a noise, and that is what started me up stairs. And he may be in the house yet. I shall not rest easy until you look into all the closets and down cellar and everywhere."

So Philip, to quiet his wife, searched the house thoroughly, but found nothing. The servant and the minister's wife followed along at a respectful distance behind Philip, one armed with the poker and the other with a fire shovel, while he pulled open closet doors with reckless disregard of any possible man hiding within and pretended to look into the most unlikely places for him, joking all the while to reassure his trembling followers.

They found one of the windows in Philip's study partly open. But that did not prove anything, although a man might have crawled in and out again through that window from an ell of the parsonage, the roof of which ran near enough to the window so that an active person could gain entrance that way. The whole affair remained more or less a mystery to Philip. However, the letters and the knife were real. He took them down town next day to the office of the evening paper and asked the editor to publish the letters and describe the knife. It was too good a piece of news to omit, and Milton people were treated to a genuine sensation when the article came out. Philip's object in giving the incident publicity was to show the community what a murderous element it was fostering in the saloon power. Those threats and the knife preached a sermon to the thoughtful people of Milton, and citizens who had never asked the question before began to ask now, "Are we to endure this saloon monster much longer?"

As for Philip, he went his way the same as ever. Some of his friends and church members even advised him to carry a revolver and be careful about going out alone at night. Philip laughed at the idea of a revolver and said: "If the saloon men want to get rid of me without the trouble of shooting me themselves, they had better make me a present of a silver mounted pistol. Then I would manage the shooting myself. And as for being careful about going out evenings, what is this town thinking of that it will continue to license and legalize an institution that makes its honest citizens advise newcomers to stay at home for fear of assassination? No. I shall go about my work just as if I lived in the most law-abiding community in America. And if I am murdered by the whisky men I want the people of Milton to understand that the citizens are as much to blame for the murder as the saloon men. For a community that will license such a curse ought to bear the shame of the legitimate fruits of it."

The trial of the man with the harelip had been postponed for some legal reason, and Philip felt relieved somewhat. He dreamed the ordeal of the court scene. And one or two visits made at the jail had not been helpful to him. The man had refused each time to see the minister, and he had gone away feeling hungry in his soul for the man's redemption and realizing something of the spirit of Christ when he was compelled to cry out, "They will not come unto me that they might have eternal life." That always seemed to Philip the most awful feature of the history of Christ—that the very people he loved and yearned after

spit upon him and finally broke his heart with their hatred.

He continued his study of the problem of the town, believing that every place has certain peculiar local characteristics which every church and preacher ought to study. He was struck by the aspect of the lower part of the town, where nearly all the poorer people lived. He went down there and studied the situation thoroughly. It did not take a very great amount of thinking to convince him that the church power in Milton was not properly distributed. The seven largest churches in the place were all on one street, well up in the wealthy residence portion and not more than two or three blocks apart. Down in the tenement district there was not a single church building and only one or two weak mission schools which did not touch the problem of the district at all. The distance from this poor part of the town to the churches was fully a mile, a distance that certainly stood as a geographical obstacle to the church attendance of the neighborhood, even supposing the people were eager to go to the large churches, which was not at all the fact. Indeed, Philip soon discovered that the people were indifferent in the matter. The churches on the fashionable street in town meant less than nothing to them. They never would go to them, and there was little hope that anything the pastor or members could do would draw the people that distance to come within church influence. The fact of the matter was the seven churches of different denominations in Milton had no living connection whatever with nearly one-half the population, and that the most needy half, of the place.

The longer Philip studied the situation the more un-Christian it looked to him and the more he longed to change it. He went over the ground again and again very carefully. He talked with the different ministers and the most advanced Christians in his own church. There was a variety of opinion as to what might be done, but no one was ready for the radical move which Philip advocated when he came to speak on the subject the first Sunday of the month.

CHAPTER VIII.

The first Sunday was beginning to be more or less dreaded or anticipated by Calvary church people. They were learning to expect something radical, sweeping, almost revolutionary in Philip's utterances on "Christ and Modern Society." Some agreed with him as far as he had gone. Very many had been hurt at his plainness of speech. This was especially true of the property owners and the fashionable part of the membership. Yet there was a fascination about Philip's preaching that prevented so far any very serious outbreak or dissension in the church. He was a recognized leader. In his presentation of truth he was large minded. He had the faculty of holding men's respect. There was no mistaking the situation, however. Mr. Winter, with others, was working against him. Philip was vaguely conscious of much that did not work out into open, apparent fact. Nevertheless, when he came up on the first Sunday of the next month and began to announce his subject, he found an audience that crowded the house to the doors, and among them were scattered numbers of men from the workingmen's district with whom Philip had talked while down there. It was, as before, an inspiring congregation, and Philip faced it, feeling sure in his heart that he had a great subject to unfold and a message to deliver to the church of Christ such as he could not but believe Christ would most certainly present if he were living today in Milton.

He began by describing the exact condition of affairs in Milton. To assist this description he had brought with him into the church his map of the town.

"Look now," he said, pointing out the different localities, "at B street, where we now are. Here are seven of the largest churches of the place on this street. The entire distance between the first of these church buildings and the last one is a little over a mile. Three of these churches are only two blocks apart. Then consider the character of the residences and people in the vicinity of this street. It is what is called desirable—that is, the homes are the very finest, and the people, almost without exception, are refined, respectable, well educated and Christian in training. All the wealth of the town centers about B street. All the society life extends out from it on each side. It is considered the most fashionable street for drives and promenades. It is well lighted, well paved, well kept. The people who come out of the houses on B street are always well dressed. The people who go into these seven churches are as a rule well dressed and comfortable looking. Mind you," continued Philip, raising his hand with a significant gesture, "I do not want to have you think that I consider good clothes and comfortable looks as un-Christian or anything against the people who present such an appearance. Far from it. I simply mention this fact to make the contrast I am going to show you all the plainer. For let us leave B street now and go down into the flats by the river, where nearly all the mill people have their homes. I wish you would note first the distance from B street and the churches to this tenement district. It is nine blocks—that is, a little over a mile. To the edge of the tenement houses farthest from our own church building it is a mile and three-quarters. And within that entire district, measuring nearly two by three miles, there is not a church building. There are two feeble mission schools, which are held in plain, unattractive halls, where every Sunday a handful of children meet, but nothing practically is being done by the church of Christ in this place to give the people in that part of the town the privileges and power of

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