

THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG.

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She was just on the point of shutting the door as he started down the sidewalk when a sharp report rang out close by. She screamed and flung the door open again, as by the light of the street lamp she saw Philip stagger and then leap into the street toward an elm tree which grew almost opposite the parsonage. When he was about in the middle of the street, she was horrified to see a man step out boldly from behind the tree, raise a gun and deliberately fire at Philip again. This time Philip fell and did not rise. His tall form lay where the rays of the street lamp shone on it, and he had fallen so that as his arms stretched out there he made the figure of a huge and prostrate cross.

CHAPTER V.

As people waked up in Milton the Wednesday morning after the shooting of Philip Strong they grew conscious of the fact, as the news came to their knowledge, that they had been nursing for 50 years one of the most brutal and cowardly institutions on earth and licensing it to do the very thing which at last it had done. For the time being Milton suffered a genuine shock. Long pent up feeling against the whisky power burst out, and public sentiment for once condemned the source of the cowardly attempt to murder.

Various rumors were flying about. It was said that Mr. Strong had been stabbed in the back while out making parish calls in company with his wife and that she had been wounded by a pistol shot herself. It was also said that he had been shot through the heart and instantly killed. But all these confused reports were finally set at rest when those calling at the parsonage brought away the exact truth.

The first shot fired by the man from behind the tree struck Philip in the knee, but the ball glanced off. He felt the blow and staggered, but his next impulse was to rush in the direction of the sound and disarm his assailant. That was the reason he had leaped into the street. But the second shot was better aimed, and the bullet crashed into his upper arm and shoulder, shattering the bone and producing an exceedingly painful, though not fatal, wound.

The shock caused Philip to fall, and he fainted away, but not before the face of the man who had shot him was clearly stamped on his mind. He knew that he was one of the saloon proprietors whose establishment Philip had visited the week before. He was a man with a harelip, and there was no mistaking his countenance.

When the people of Milton learned that Philip was not fatally wounded, their excitement cooled a little. A wave of indignation, however, swept over the town when it was learned that the would-be murderer was recognized by the minister, and it was rumored that he had openly threatened that he would "fix the cursed preacher so that he would not be able to preach again."

Philip, however, felt more full of fight against the rum devil than ever. As he lay on the bed the morning after the shooting he had nothing to regret or fear. The surgeon had been called at once, as soon as his wife and the alarmed neighbors had been able to carry him into the parsonage. The ball had been removed and the wounds dressed. By noon he had recovered somewhat from the effects of the operation and was resting, although very weak from the shock and suffering considerable pain.

"What is that stain on the floor, Sarah?" he asked as his wife came in with some article for his comfort. Philip lay where he could see into the other room.

"It is your blood, Philip," replied his wife, with a shudder. "It dripped like a stream from your shoulder as we carried you in last night. Oh, Philip, it is dreadful! It seems to me like an awful nightmare. Let us move away from this terrible place. You will be killed if we stay here."

"There isn't much danger if the rest of 'em are as poor shots as this fellow," replied Philip. "Now, little woman, I went on cheerfully, 'don't worry. I don't believe they'll try it again.'"

Mrs. Strong controlled herself. She did not want to break down while Philip was in his present condition. "You must not talk," she said as she smoothed his hair back from the pale forehead.

"That's pretty hard on a preacher, don't you think, Sarah? My occupation is gone if I can't talk."

"Then I'll talk for two. They say that most women can do that."

"Will you preach for me next Sunday?"

"What, and make myself a target for saloon keepers? No, thank you. I have half a mind to forbid you ever preaching again. It will be the death of you."

"It is the life of me, Sarah. I would not ask anything better than to die with the armor on, fighting evil. Well, all right. I won't talk any more. I suppose there's no objection to my thinking a little?"

"Thinking is the worst thing you can do. You just want to lie there and do nothing but get well."

"All right. I'll quit everything except eating and sleeping. Put up a little placard on the head of the bed sav-

ing: 'Beware! Cautiously in Milton! A live minister who has stopped thinking and talking! Admission 10 cents! Proceeds to be devoted to teach saloon keepers how to shoot straight!' Philip was still somewhat under the influence of the doctor's anaesthetic, and as he faintly murmured this absurd sentence he fell into a slumber which lasted several hours, from which he awoke very feeble and realizing that he would be confined to the house some time, but feeling in good spirits and thankful out of the depths of his vigorous nature that he was still spared to do God's will on earth.

The next day he felt strong enough to receive a few visitors. Among them was the chief of police, who came to inquire concerning the identity of the man who had done the shooting. Philip showed some reluctance to witness against his enemy. It was only when he remembered that he owed a duty to society as well as to himself that he described the man and related minutely the entire affair exactly as it occurred.

"Is the man in town?" asked Philip.

"Has he not fled?"

"I think I know where he is," replied the officer. "He's in hiding, but I can find him. In fact, we have been hunting for him since the shooting. He is wanted on several other charges."

Philip was pondering something in silence. At last he said: "When you have arrested him, I wish you would bring him here if it can be done without violating any ordinance or statute."

The officer stared at the request, and the minister's wife exclaimed: "Philip, you will not have that man come into the house! Besides, you are not well enough to endure a meeting with the wretch!"

"Sarah, I have a good reason for it. Really, I am well enough. You will bring him, won't you? I do not wish to make any mistake in the matter. Before the man is really confined under a criminal charge of attempt to murder I would like to confront him here. There can be no objection to that, can there?"

The officer finally promised that, if he could do so without attracting too much attention, he would comply with the request. It was a thing he had never done before. He was not quite easy in his mind about it. Nevertheless Philip exercised a winning influence over all sorts and conditions of men, and he felt quite sure that if the officer could arrest his man quietly he would bring him to the parsonage.

This was Thursday night. The next evening, just after dark, the bell rang, and one of the church members who had been staying with Mr. Strong during the day went to the door. There stood two men. One of them was the chief of police. He inquired how the minister was and said that he had a man with him whom the minister was anxious to see.

Philip heard them talking and guessed who they were. He sent his wife out to have the men come in. The officer with his man came into the bedroom where Philip lay, still weak and suffering, but at his request propped up a little with pillows.

"Well, Mr. Strong, I have got the man, and here he is," said the officer, wondering what Philip could want of him. "I ran him down in the 'crow's nest' below the mills, and we popped him into a hack and drove right up here with him. And a pretty sweet specimen he is, I can tell you! Take off your hat and let the gentleman have another look at the brave chap who fired at him in ambush."

The officer spoke almost brutally, forgetting for a moment that the prisoner's hands were manacled. Remembering it the next instant, he pulled off the man's hat, while Philip looked calmly at the features. Yes, it was the same hideous, brutal face, with the harelip, which had shone up in the rays of the street lamp that night. There was no mistaking it for any other.

"Why did you want to kill me?" asked Philip after a significant pause. "I never did you any harm."

"I would like to kill all the cursed preachers," replied the man hoarsely.

"You confess, then, that you are the man who fired at me, do you?"

"I don't confess anything. What are you talking to me for? Take me to the lockup if you're going to!" the man exclaimed fiercely, turning to the officer.

"Philip," cried his wife, turning to him with a gesture of appeal, "send them away! It will do no good to talk to this man!"

Philip raised his hand in a gesture toward the man that made every one in the room feel a little awed. The officer, in speaking of it afterward, said: "I tell you, boys, I never felt quite the same except once, when the old Catholic priest stepped up on the platform with old man Gower time he was hanged at Millville. Somehow then I felt as if, when the priest raised his hand and began to pray, maybe we might all be glad to have some one pray for us if we get into a tight place."

Philip spoke directly to the man, whose look fell beneath that of the minister.

"You know well enough that you are

the man who shot me Tuesday night. I know you are the man, for I saw your face very plainly by the light of the street lamp. Now, all that I wanted to see you here for before you were taken to jail was to let you know that I do not bear any hatred toward you. The thing you have done is against the law of God and man. The injury you have inflicted upon me is very slight compared with that against your own soul. Oh, my brother man, why should you try to harm me because I denounced your business? Do you not know

in your heart of hearts that the saloon is so evil in its effects that a man who loves his home and his country must speak out against it? And yet I love you. That is possible because you are human. Oh, my Father," Philip continued, changing his appeal to the man by an almost natural manner into a petition to the Infinite, "make this soul dear to thee, to behold thy love for him, and make him see that it is not against me, a mere man, that he has sinned, but against thyself—against the purity and holiness and affection! Oh, my God, thou who didst come in the likeness of sinful men to seek and save that which was lost, stretch out the arms of thy salvation now to this child and save him from himself, from his own disbelief, his hatred of me or of what I have said! Thou art all merciful and all loving. We leave all souls of men in the protecting, infolding embrace of thy boundless compassion and infinite mercy."

There was a moment of entire quiet in the room, and then Philip said faintly: "Sarah, I cannot say more. Only tell the man I bear him no hatred and commend him to the love of God."

Mrs. Strong was alarmed at Philip's appearance. The scene had been too much for his strength. She hastily commanded the officer to take his prisoner away and with the help of her friend cared for the minister, who, after the first faintness, rallied and then gradually sank into sleep that proved more refreshing than any he had yet enjoyed since the night of the shooting.

The next day found Mrs. Strong improving more rapidly than Mrs. Strong had thought possible. She forbade him the sight of all callers, however, and insisted that he must keep quiet. His wounds were healing satisfactorily, and when the surgeon called he expressed himself much pleased with his patient's appearance.

"Say, doctor, do you really think it would set me back any to think a little?"

"No, I never heard of thinking hurting people. I have generally considered it a healthy habit."

"The reason I asked," continued Philip gravely, "was because my wife absolutely forbade it, and I was wondering how long I could keep it up and fool myself."

"That's a specimen of his stubbornness, doctor," said the minister's wife, smiling. "Why, only a few minutes before you came in he was insisting that he could preach tomorrow. Think of it, a man with a shattered shoulder, who would have to stand on one leg and do all his gesturing with his left hand; a man who can't preach without the use of seven or eight arms and as many pockets and has to walk up and down the platform like a lion when he gets started on his delivery! And yet he wants to preach tomorrow! He's that stubborn that I don't know that I can keep him at home. You would better leave some powders to put him to sleep, and we will keep him in a state of unconsciousness until Monday morning."

"Now, doctor, just listen to me awhile. Mrs. Strong is talking for two women, as she agreed to do, and that puts me in a hard position. But I want to know how soon I can get to work again."

"You will have to lie there a month," said the doctor bluntly.

"Impossible! I never lied that time in my life!" said Philip soberly.

"It would serve him right to perform a surgical operation on him for that, wouldn't it, Mrs. Strong?" the surgeon appealed to her.

"I think he deserves the worst you can do, doctor."

"But say, dear people, I can't stay here a month. I must be about my Master's business. What will the church do for supplies?"

"Don't worry, Philip. The church will take care of that."

But Philip was already eager to get to work. Only the assurance of the surgeon that he might possibly get out in a little over three weeks satisfied him. Sunday came and passed. Some one from a neighboring town who happened to be visiting in Milton occupied the pulpit, and Philip had a quiet, restful day. He started in the week determined to beat the doctor's time for recovery, and, having a remarkably strong constitution and a tremendous will, he bade fair to be limping about the house in two weeks. His shoulder wound healed very fast. His knee bothered him, and it seemed likely that he would go lame for a long time. But he was not concerned about that if only he could go about in any sort of fashion once more.

Wednesday of that week he was surprised in an unexpected manner by an event which did more than anything else to hasten his recovery. He was still confined to bed down stairs when in the afternoon the bell rang, and Mrs. Strong went to the door, supposing it was one of the church people come to inquire about the minister. She found instead Alfred Burke, Philip's old college chum and seminary classmate. Mrs. Strong welcomed him heartily, and in answer to his eager inquiry concerning Philip's condition she brought him into the room, knowing her patient quite well and feeling sure the sight of his old chum would do him more good than harm. The first thing Alfred said was:

"Old man, I hardly expected to see you again this side of heaven. How does it happen that you are alive here

That Cough Hangs On

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For Homeless Children.

Secretary Quivey of the Nebraska Children's Home society, from Omaha, was in the city, close of last week, to take charge of the two little Hill boys, Edwin and Ernest, who were given into the charge of the society by Judge Norris of the district court at the session of the court, last week. On Sunday morning, Secretary Quivey occupied the Congregational pulpit and made an earnest plea for the society, setting forth its noble, Christ-like work, and its financial needs. His address touched every heart. A collection was taken up, which amounted to \$8; besides nine life memberships were secured for the society, making in all \$49 raised. This makes about forty life memberships held by the people of McCook. Mr. Quivey departed, Monday morning, for the eastern part of the state, where he will place the Hill boys in good Christian homes. In the past few years the society has placed about 400 children in good homes.

A Special Aide.

Captain Justin A. Wilcox of our city has been appointed by State Commander J. E. Evans of the Grand Army of the Republic a special aide for Red Willow county for the dissemination and promulgation of patriotic education among the school children of the county. This plan is being carried out by the state commander in the various counties of the state, and is a commendable one.

Foliage, Fruit and Flowers.

The tree man is in town. We mean, of course, Mr. Cullen, whose annual visits always bring pleasure and profit to those who delight in foliage, fruit and flowers. Mr. Cullen is well known as the representative of THE INTERNATIONAL NURSERIES, of Denver, Colo., and is making his regular tour among his many patrons, for he is one of those men who are always asked to "come again." This year he brings with him still greater and grander triumphs of the tree growers' art than ever before, for his firm, which is one of the largest and most reliable in the world, feels a pardonable pride in offering to its patrons not only the very best and choicest of the well known varieties of everything that grows, but the newest, the latest, and most remarkable discoveries as well. New patrons will find what all the old ones have already learned, that whether they want fruit trees, shade trees, ornamental shrubbery or flowering plants, when they order from this firm they get something they can rely upon as being just what they want. Their trees and plants have been tested in every portion of the United States, and their reliability and superiority thoroughly established.

Mr. Cullen is an expert as a landscape architect, having planted some of the largest and best lawns, as well as many of the finest orchards in America, and his work is its own convincing recommendation. He was born and bred in the nursery business, and understands trees and plants as well as any man in the world. His complete knowledge of the business, together with his long, varied and valuable experience makes him a safe guide for planters and growers, and enables him to recommend to his patrons those varieties that will give the greatest amount of satisfaction.

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