

THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG.

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after all the times the papers have had you killed?"

"Bad marksmanship principally. I used to think I was a big man. But after the shooting I came to the conclusion that I must be rather small."

"Your heart is so big it's a wonder to me that you weren't shot through it, no matter where you were hit. But I tell you it seems good to see you in the flesh once more."

"Why didn't you come and preach for me last Sunday?" asked Philip quizzically.

"Why, haven't you heard? I did not get news of the affair until last Saturday in my western parish, and I was just in the throes of packing up to come on to Elmdale."

"Elmdale?"

"Yes; I've had a call there. So we shall be neighbors. Mrs. Burke is up there now getting the house straightened out, and I came right down here."

"So you are pastor of the Chapel Hill church? It's a splendid opening for a young preacher. Congratulations, Alfred."

"Thank you, Philip. By the way, I saw by the paper that you had declined a call to Elmdale, so I suppose they pitched on me for a second choice. You never wrote me of their call to you," he said, a little reproachfully.

"It didn't occur to me," replied Philip truthfully. "But how are you going to like it? Isn't it rather a dull old place?"

"Yes, I suspect it is, compared with Milton. I suppose you couldn't live without the excitement of dodging as-



"I hardly expected to see you again," said Philip, "and murderers every time you go out to prayer meeting or make parish calls. How do you like your work so far?"

"There is plenty of it," answered Philip gravely. "A minister must be made of cast iron and fire brick in order to stand the wear and tear of these times in which we live. I'd like a week to trade ideas with you and talk over the work, Alfred."

"You'd get the worst of the bargain."

"I don't know about that. I'm not doing any thinking lately. But now, as we're going to be only 50 miles apart, what's to hinder an exchange once in awhile?"

"I'm agreeable to that," replied Philip's chum; "on condition, however, that you furnish me with a gun and pay all surgeon's bills when I occupy your post."

"No," said Philip, with a grin. And Mrs. Strong forbade any talk.

Alfred staid until the evening train, and when he left he stooped down and kissed Philip's cheek. "It's a custom we learned when in the German universities together that summer after college, you know," he explained, with the slightest possible blush, when Mrs. Strong came in and caught him in the act. It seemed to her, however, like an affecting thing that two big, grown up men like her husband and his old chum showed such tender affection for each other. The love of men for men in the strong friendship of school and college life is one of the marks of human divinity.

CHAPTER VI.

In spite of his determination to get out and occupy his pulpit the first Sunday of the next month Philip was reluctantly obliged to let five Sundays go by before he was able to preach. During those six weeks his attention was called to a subject which he felt ought to be made the theme of one of his talks on "Christ and Modern Society." The leisure which he had for reading opened his eyes to the fact that Sunday in Milton was terribly desecrated. Shops of all kinds stood wide open. Excursion trains ran into the large city 40 miles away, two theaters were always running with some variety show, and the saloons, in violation of an ordinance forbidding it, unblushingly flung their doors open and did more business on that day than any other. As Philip read the papers he noticed that every Monday morning the police court was more crowded with "drunks" and "disorderlies" than on any other day in the week, and the plain cause of it was the abuse of the day before.

In the summer time baseball games were played in Milton on Sunday. In the fall and winter very many people spent their evenings in card playing or aimlessly strolling up and down the main street. These facts came to Philip's knowledge gradually, and he was

not long in making up his mind that Christ would not keep silent before the facts. So he carefully prepared a plain statement of his belief in Christ's standing on the modern use of Sunday, and as on the other occasions when he had spoken the first Sunday in the month he cast out of his reckoning all thought of the consequences. His one purpose was to do just as, in his thought of Christ, he would do with that subject.

The people in Milton thought that the first Sunday Philip appeared in his pulpit he would naturally denounce the saloon again. But when he finally recovered sufficiently to preach he determined that for awhile he would say nothing in the way of sermons against the whisky evil. He had a great horror of seeming to ride a hobby, of being a man of one idea and making people tired of him because he harped on one string. He had uttered his denunciation, and he would wait a little before he spoke again. The whisky power was not the only bad thing in Milton that needed to be attacked. There were other things which must be said. And so Philip limped into his pulpit the third Sunday of the month and preached on a general theme, to the disappointment of a great crowd almost as large as the last one he had faced. And yet his very appearance was a sermon in itself against the institution he had held up to public condemnation on that occasion. His knee wound proved very stubborn, and he limped badly. That in itself spoke eloquently of the dastardly attempt on his life. His face was pale, and he had grown thin. His shyness was stiff, and the enforced quietness of his delivery contrasted strangely with his customary fiery appearance on the platform. Altogether that first Sunday of his reappearance in his pulpit was a stronger sermon against the saloon than anything he could have spoken or written.

When the first Sunday in the next month came on, Philip was more like his old self. He had gathered strength enough to go around two Sunday afternoons and note for himself the desecration of the day as it went on recklessly. As he saw it all it seemed to him that the church in Milton was practically doing nothing to stop the evil. All the ministers complained of the difficulty of getting an evening congregation. Yet hundreds of young people walked past all the churches every Sunday night, bent on pleasure, going to the theaters or concerts or parties, which seemed to have no trouble in attracting the crowd. Especially was this true of the foreign population, the working element connected with the mills. It was a common occurrence for dog fights, cock fights and shooting matches of various kinds to be going on in the tenement district on Sunday, and the police seemed powerless or careless in the matter.

All this burned into Philip like molten metal, and when he faced his people on the Sunday which was becoming a noted Sunday for them he quivered with the earnestness and thrill which always come to a sensitive man when he feels sure he has a sermon which must be preached and a message which the people must hear for their lives.

He took for a text Christ's words, "The Sabbath was made for man," and at once defined its meaning as a special day.

"The true meaning of our modern Sunday may be summed up in two words—rest and worship. Under the head of rest may be gathered whatever is needful for the proper and healthful recuperation of one's physical and mental powers, always regarding not simply our own ease and comfort, but also the same right to rest on the part of the remainder of the community. Under the head of worship may be gathered all those facts which, either through distinct religious service or work or thought, tend to bring men into closer and dearer relation to spiritual life, to teach men larger, sweeter truths of existence and of God and leave them better fitted to take up the duties of everyday business.

"Now, it is plain to me that if Christ were here today and pastor of Calvary church he would feel compelled to say some very plain words about the desecration of Sunday in Milton. Take, for example, the opening of the fruit stands and cigar stores and meat markets every Sunday morning. What is the one reason why these places are open this very minute while I am speaking? There is only one reason—so that the owners of the places may sell their goods and make money. They are not satisfied with what they can make six days in the week. Their greed seizes on the one day which ought to be used for the rest and worship men need and turns that also into a day of merchandise. Do we need any other fact to convince us of the terrible selfishness of the human heart?

"Or take the case of the saloons. What right have they to open their doors in direct contradiction to the town ordinance forbidding it? And yet this ordinance is held by them in such contempt that this very morning as I came to this church I passed more than half a dozen of these sections of hell, wide open to any poor sinning soul that might be enticed therein.

Citizens of Milton. Where does the responsibility rest for this violation of law? Does it rest with the churches and the preachers to see that the few Sunday laws we have are enforced by them, while the business men and the police lazily dodge the issue and care not how the matter goes, saying it is none of their business?

"But suppose you say the saloons are beyond your power. That does not release you from doing what is in your power, easily, to prevent this day from being trampled under foot and made like every other day in its scramble after money and pleasure. Who own these fruit stands and cigar stores and meat markets and who patronize them? Is it not true that church members encourage all these places by purchasing of them on the Lord's day? I have been told by one of these fruit dealers with whom I have talked lately that among his best customers on Sunday are some of the most respected members of this church. It has also been told me that in the summer time the heaviest patronage of the Sunday ice cream business is from the church members of Milton. Of what value is it that we place on our ordinance rules forbidding the sale of these things covered by the law? How far are we responsible for our example for encouraging the breaking of the day on the part of those who would find it unprofitable to keep their business going if we did not purchase of them on this day?

"It is possible there are very many persons here in this house this morning who are ready to exclaim: 'This is intolerable bigotry and puritanical narrowness. This is not the attitude Christ would take on this question. He was too large minded. He was too far advanced in thought to make the day to mean anything of that sort.'

"But let us consider what is meant by the Sunday of our modern life as Christ would view it. There is no disputing the fact that the age is material, mercantile, money making. For six eager, rushing days it is absorbed in the pursuit of money or fame or pleasure. Then God strikes the note of his silence in among the clashing sounds of earth's Babel and calls mankind to make a day unlike the other days. It is his merciful thoughtfulness for the race which has created this special day for men. Is it too much to ask that on this one day men think of something else besides politics, stocks, business, amusement? Is God grudging the man the pleasure of life when here he gives the man six days for labor and then asks for only one day specially set apart for him? The objection to very many things commonly mentioned by the pulpit as harmful to Sunday is not an objection necessarily based on the harmfulness of the things themselves, but upon the fact that these things are repetitions of the working day and so are distracting to the observance of the Sunday as a day of rest and worship, undisturbed by the things that have already for six days crowded the thought of men. Let me illustrate.

"Take, for example, the case of the Sunday paper as it pours into Milton every Sunday morning on the special newspaper train. Now, there may not be anything in the contents of the Sunday papers that is any worse than can be found in any weekday edition. Granted, for the sake of the illustration, that the matter found in the Sunday paper is just like that in the Saturday issue—politics, locals, fashion, personals, dramatic and sporting news, literary articles by well known writers, fatality, etc., anywhere from 20 to 40 pages—an amount of reading matter that will take the average man a whole forenoon to read.

"I say, granted all this vast quantity of material is harmless in itself to moral life, yet here is the reason why it seems to me Christ would, as I am doing now, advise this church and the people of Milton to avoid reading the Sunday paper, because it forces upon the thought of the community the very same things which have been crowding in upon it all the week and in doing this necessarily distracts the man and makes the elevation of his spiritual nature exceedingly doubtful or difficult. I defy any preacher in this town to make much impression on the average man who has come to church saturated through and through with 40 pages of Sunday newspaper—that is, supposing the man who has read that much is in a frame of mind to go to church. But that is not the point. It is not a question of press versus pulpit. The press and the pulpit are units of our modern life which ought to work hand in hand. And the mere matter of church attendance might not count if it was a question with the average man whether he would go to church and hear a dull sermon or stay at home and read an interesting newspaper. That is not the point. The point is whether the day of rest and worship shall be like every other day; whether we shall let our minds go right on as they have been going, to the choking up of avenues of spiritual growth and religious service. Is it right for us to allow in Milton the occurrence of baseball games and Sunday racing and evening theaters? How far is all this demoralizing to our better life? What would Christ say, do you think? Even supposing he would advise this church to take and read the big Sunday daily sent in on the special Sunday train that keeps a small army of men at work and away from all Sunday privileges; even supposing he would say it was all right to sell fruit and cigars and meat on Sunday and perfectly proper for church members to buy those things on that day, what would Christ say was the real meaning and purpose of this day in the thought of the Divine Creator when he made the day for man?

"I cannot conceive that he would say anything else than this to the people of this town and this church: He

would say it was our duty to make this day different from all other days in the two particulars of rest and worship. He would say that we owe it to the Father of our souls in common gratitude for his mighty love toward us that we spend the day in ways pleasing to him. He would say that the wonderful civilization of our times should study how to make this day a true rest day to the workman of the world and that all unnecessary carrying of passengers or merchandise should stop, so as to give all men, if possible, every seven days one whole day of rest and communion with something better than the things that perish with the using. He would say that the church and the church member and the Christian everywhere should do all in his power to make the day a glad, powerful, useful, restful, anticipated 24 hours, looked forward to with pleasant longing by little children and laboring men and railroad men and street car men as the one day of all the week, the happiest and best because different in its use. And so different that when Monday's toil begins the man feels refreshed in body and in soul because he has paused a little while in the mad whirl of his struggle for bread or fame and has fellowshiped with heavenly things and heard something diviner than the jangling discords of this narrow, selfish earth.

"If this thought of Sunday is bigotry or narrowness, then I stand convicted as a bigot living outside of the nineteenth century. But I am not concerned about that. What I am concerned about is Christ's thought of this day. If I understand his spirit right, I believe he would say what I have said. He would say that it is not a right use of this day for the men and women of this generation to buy and sell merchandise, to attend or countenance

places or spectacles of amusement, to engage in card parties at their homes, to fill their thoughts full of the ordinary affairs of business or the events of the world. He would say that it was the Christian's duty and privilege in this age to elevate the uses of this day so that everything done and said should tend to lift the race higher and make it better acquainted with the nature of God and its own eternal destiny.

"If Christ would not take that view of this great question, then I have totally misconceived and misunderstood his character. 'The Sabbath was made for man.' It was made for him that he might make of it a shining jewel in the string of pearls which should adorn all the days of the week, every day speaking of divine things to the man, but Sunday opening up the beauty and grandeur of the eternal life a little wider yet.

"This, dear friends all, has been my message to you this morning. May God forgive whatever has been spoken contrary to the heart and spirit of our dear Lord."

If Philip's sermon two months before made him enemies, this sermon made even more. He had unconsciously this time struck two of his members very hard. One of them was part owner in a meat market which his partner kept open on Sunday. The other leased one of the parks where the baseball games had been played. Other persons in the congregation felt more or less hurt by the plain way Philip had spoken, especially the members who took and read the Sunday paper. They went away feeling that, while much that he said was true, there was too much strictness in the minister's view of the whole subject. This feeling grew as days went on. People said Philip did not know all the facts in regard to people's business and the complications which necessitated Sunday work and so forth.

These were the beginnings of troublesome times for Philip. The trial of the saloon keeper was coming on in a few days, and Philip would be called to witness in the case. He dreaded it with a nervous dread peculiar to his sensitive temper. Nevertheless he went on with his church work, studying the problem of the town, endeavoring himself to very many in and out of his church by his manly, courageous life



"Verily an enemy hath done this."

and feeling the headache grow in him as the sin burden of the place weighed heavier on him. Those were days when Philip did much praying, and his regular preaching, which grew in power with the common people, told the story of his night vigils with the Christ he adored.

It was at this particular time that a special event occurred which put its mark on Philip's work in Milton and became a part of its web and woof, a hard thing to tell, but necessary to relate as best one may.

He came home late one evening from church meeting, letting himself into the parsonage with his night key, and not seeing his wife in the sitting room, where she was in the habit of reading and sewing, he walked on into the small sewing room, where she sometimes sat at special work, thinking to find her there. She was not there, and

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