

THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG.

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Author of "In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?" "Malcom Kirk," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," Etc.

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the life of Christ, the life more abundantly.

"The houses down there are of the cheapest description. The people who come out of them are far from well dressed. The streets and alleys are dirty and ill smelling, and no one cares to promenade for pleasure up and down the sidewalks in that neighborhood. It is not a safe place to go to at night. The most frequent disturbances come from that part of the town. All the hard characters find refuge there. And let me say that I am not now speaking of the working people. They are almost without exception law abiding. But in every town like ours the floating population of vice and crime seeks naturally that part of a town where the poorest houses are, and the most saloons, and the greatest darkness, both physical and moral.

"If there is a part of this town which needs lifting up and cleaning and healing and inspiring by the presence of the church of Christ, it is right there where there is no church. The people on B street and for six or eight blocks each side know the gospel. They have large numbers of books and papers and much Christian literature. They have been taught the Bible truths; they are familiar with them. Of what value is it, then, to continue to support on this short street, so near together, seven churches, of as many different denominations, which have for their members the respectable, moral people of the town? I do not mean to say that the well to do, respectable people do not need the influence of the church and the preaching of the gospel. But they can get these privileges without such a fearful waste of material and power. If we had only three or four churches on this street they would be enough. We are wasting our Christianity with the present arrangement. We are giving the rich and the educated and well to do people seven times as much church as we are giving the poor, the ignorant and the struggling workers in the tenement district. There is no question, there can be no question, that all this is wrong. It is opposed to every principle that Christ advocated. And in the face of these plain facts, which no one can dispute, there is a duty before these churches on this street which cannot be evaded without denying the very purpose of a church. It is that duty which I am now going to urge upon this Calvary church.

"It has been said by some of the ministers and members of the churches that we might combine in an effort and build a large and commodious mission in the tenement district. But that, to my mind, would not settle the problem at all as it should be settled. It is an easy and a lazy thing for church members to put their hands in their pockets and say to a few other church members: 'We will help build a mission if you will run it after it is up. We will attend our church up town here while the mission is worked for the poor people down there.' That is not what will meet the needs of the situation. What that part of Milton needs is the church of Christ in its members—the whole church on the largest possible scale. What I am now going to propose, therefore, is something which I believe Christ would advocate, if not in the exact manner I shall explain, at least in the same spirit."

Philip paused a moment and looked over the congregation earnestly. The expectation of the people was roused almost to the point of a sensation as he went on:

"I have consulted competent authorities, and they say that our church building here could be moved from its present foundation without serious damage to the structure. A part of it would have to be torn down to assist the moving, but it could easily be replaced. The expense would not be more than we could readily meet. We are out of debt, and the property is free from incumbrance. What I propose, therefore, is a very simple thing—that we move our church edifice down into the heart of the tenement district, where we can buy a suitable lot for a comparatively small sum, and at once begin the work of a Christian church in the very neighborhood where such work is most needed.

"There are certain objections to this plan. I think they can be met by the exercise of the Christ spirit of sacrifice and love. A great many members will not be able to go that distance to attend service any more than the people there at present can well come up here. But there are six churches left on B street. What is to hinder any Christian member of Calvary church from working and fellowshiping with those churches if he cannot put in his service in the tenement district? None of these churches is crowded. They will welcome the advent of more members. But the main strength of the plan which I propose lies in the fact that if it be done it will be a live illustration of the eagerness of the church to reach and save men. The very sight of our church moving down off from this street to the lower part of the town will be an object lesson to the people, and the church will at once begin to mean something to them. Once established there, we can work from it as a center. The distance ought to be no discouragement to any healthy person. There is not a young woman in this church who is in the habit of dancing

who does not make twice as many steps during an evening dancing party as would be necessary to take her to the tenement district and back again. Surely any Christian church member is as willing to endure fatigue and sacrifice and to give as much time to help make men and women better as he is to have a good time himself. Think for a moment what this move which I propose would mean to the life of this town and to our Christian growth. At present we go to church. We listen to a good choir, we go home again, we have a pleasant Sunday school, we are all comfortable and well clothed here, we enjoy our services, we are not disturbed by the sight of disagreeable or un-congenial people.

"But is that Christianity? Where do the service and the self denial and the working for men's souls come in? Ah, my dear brothers and sisters, what is this church really doing for the salvation of men in this place? Is it Christianity to have a comfortable church and go to it once or twice a week to enjoy nice music and listen to preaching, and then go home to a good dinner, and that is about all? What have we sacrificed? What have we denied ourselves? What have we done to show the poor or the sinful that we care anything for their souls? That Christianity is anything but a comfortable, select religion for those who can afford the good things of the world? What has the church in Milton done to make the workingman here feel that it is an institution that throbs with the brotherhood of man? But suppose we actually move our church down there and then go there ourselves weekdays and Sundays to work for the uplift of immortal beings. Shall we not then have the satisfaction of knowing that we are at least trying to do something more than enjoy our church all by ourselves? Shall we not be able to hope that we have at least attempted to obey the spirit of our sacrificing Lord, who commanded his disciples to go and disciple the nations? It seems to me that the plan is a Christian plan. If the churches in this neighborhood were not so numerous, if the circumstances were different, it might not be wise or necessary to do what I propose. But as the facts are, I solemnly believe that this church has an opportunity before it to show Milton and the other churches and the world that it is willing to do an unusual thing, that it has within it the spirit of complete willingness to reach and lift up mankind in the way that will do it best and most speedily. If individuals are commanded to sacrifice and endure for Christ's sake and the kingdom's, I do not know why organizations should not do the same. And in this instance something on a large scale, something that represents large sacrifice, something that will convince the people of the love of man for man, is the only thing that will strike deep enough into the problem of the tenement district in Milton to begin to solve it in any satisfactory or Christian way.

"I do not expect the church to act on my plan without due deliberation. I have arrived at my own conclusions after a careful going over the entire ground. And in the sight of all the need and degradation of the people and in the light of all that Christ has made clear to be our duty as his disciples it seems to me there is but one path open to us. If we neglect to follow him as he beckons us, I believe we shall neglect the one opportunity of Calvary church to put itself in the position of the church of the crucified Lamb of God, who did not please himself, who came to minister to others, who would certainly approve of any steps his church on earth in this age might honestly make to reach men and love them and become to them the helper and savior and life giver which the great Head of the church truly intended we should be. I leave this plan which I have proposed before you for your Christian thought and prayer. And may the Holy Spirit guide us all into all the truth. Amen."

If Philip had deliberately planned to create a sensation, he could not have done anything more radical to bring it about. If he had stood on the platform and fired a gun into the audience, it would not have startled the members of Calvary church more than this calm proposal to them that they move their building a mile away from its aristocratic surroundings. Nothing, that he had said in his previous sermons had provoked such a spirit of opposition. This time the church was roused. Feelings of astonishment, indignation and alarm agitated the members of Calvary church. Some of them gathered about Philip at the close of the service.

"It will not be possible to do this thing you propose, Brother Strong," said one of the deacons, a leading member and a man who had defended Philip once or twice against public criticism.

"Why not?" asked Philip simply. He was exhausted with his effort that morning, but felt that a crisis of some sort had been precipitated by his message, and so he welcomed this show of interest which his sermon had aroused.

"The church will not agree to such a thing."

"A number of them favor such a step," replied Philip, who had talked over the matter fully with many in the

church.

"A majority will vote against it." "Yes, an overwhelming majority," said one man. "I know a good many who would not be able to go that distance to attend church, and they certainly would not join any other church on the street. I know, for one, I wouldn't."

"Not if you thought Christ's kingdom in this town would be advanced by it?" asked Philip, turning to this man with a directness that was almost bluntness. "I don't see that that would be a test of my Christianity."

"That is not the question," said one of the trustees, who had the reputation of being a very shrewd business man. "The question is concerning the feasibility of moving this property a mile into the poorest part of the town and then maintaining it there. In my opinion it cannot be done. The expenses of the organization cannot be kept up. We should lose some of our best financial supporters. Mr. Strong's spirit and purpose spring from a good motive, no doubt, but view it from a business point of view the church in that locality would not be successful. To my mind it would be a very unwise thing to do. It would practically destroy our organization here and not really establish anything there."

"I do not believe we can tell until we try," said Philip. "I certainly do not wish the church to destroy itself foolishly, but I do feel that we ought to do something very positive and very large to define our attitude as saviors in this community. And moving the house, as I propose, has the advantage of being a definite, practical step in the direction of a Christlike use of our powers as a church."

There was more talk of the same sort, but it was plainly felt by Philip that the plan he had proposed was distasteful to the greater part of the church, and if the matter came to a vote it would be defeated. He talked the plan over with his trustees, as he had already done before he spoke in public. Four of them were decided in their objection to the plan. Only one fully sustained Philip. During the week he succeeded in finding out that from his membership of 500 less than 40 persons were willing to stand by him in so radical a movement. And yet the more Philip studied the problem of the town the more he was persuaded that the only way for the church to make any impression on the tenement district was to put itself directly in touch with the neighborhood. To accomplish that necessity Philip was not stubborn. He was ready to adopt any plan that would actually do something, but he grew more eager every day that he spent in the study of the town to have the church feel its opportunity and make Christ a reality to those most in need of him.

It was at this time that Philip was surprised one evening by a call from one of the workmen who had been present and heard his sermon on moving the church into the tenement district.

"I came to see you particularly, Mr. Strong, about getting you to come down to our hall some evening next week and give us a talk on some subject connected with the signs of the times."

"I'll come if you think I can do any good in that way," replied Philip, hesitating a little.

"I believe you can. The men are beginning to take to you, and while they

"It will not be possible to do this thing you propose, Brother Strong," won't come up to church they will turn out to hear you down there."

"All right. When do you want me to come?"

"Say next Tuesday. You know where the hall is?"

Philip nodded. He had been in it in his walks through that part of Milton. The spokesman for the workmen expressed his thanks and arose to go, but Philip asked him to stay a few moments. He wanted to know at first hand what the man's representative fellows would do if the church should at any time decide to act after Philip's plan.

"Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Strong, I don't believe very many of them would join any church."

"That is not the question. Would they feel the church any more there than where it is now?"

"Yes, I honestly think they would. They would come out to hear you."

"Well, that would be something, to be sure," replied Philip, smiling. "But as to the wisdom of the plan—how does it strike you on the whole?"

"I would like to see it done. I don't believe I shall, though."

"Your church won't agree to it?"

"Maybe they will in time."

"I hope they will. And let me tell you, Mr. Strong, even if you succeeded in getting your church and people to come into the tenement district you would find plenty of people there who wouldn't go to hear you."

"I suppose that is so. But, oh, that we might do something!" Philip clasped his hands over his knee and gazed earnestly at the man opposite. The man returned the gaze almost as ear-

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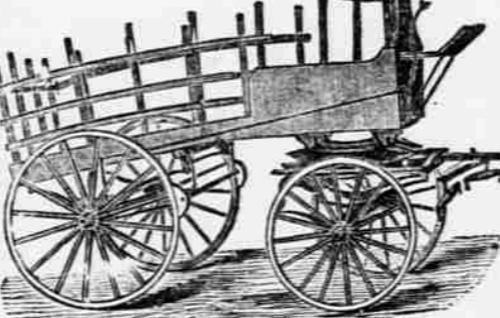
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