

# THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG.

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tual self "Gill" on the part of society for the brotherhood of man. What is society doing now? What sacrifice is it making? When it gives a charity ball, does it not spend twice as much in getting up the entertainment to please itself as it makes for the poor in whose behalf the ball is given? Do you think I am severe? Ask yourself, O member of Calvary church, what has been the extent of your sacrifice for the world this year before you condemn me for being too strict or particular. It is because we live in such times that the law of service presses upon us with greater insistence than ever. And now more than during any of the ages gone Christ's words ring in our ears with 20 centuries of reverberation, "Whosoever will not deny himself and take up his cross, he cannot be my disciple."

Of all the sermons on Christ and modern society which Phillip had thus far preached none had hit so hard or was applied so personally as this. The Golden went home from the service in a towering rage. "That settles Calvary church for me!" said Mrs. Golden as she flung herself out of the building after the service was over. "I consider that the most insulting sermon I ever heard from any minister. It is simply outlandish, and how the church can endure such preaching much longer is a wonder to me. I don't go near it again while Mr. Strong is the minister!" Phillip did not know it yet, but he was destined to find out that society carries a tremendous power in its use of the word "outlandish" applied either to persons or things.

When the evening service was over, Phillip, as his habit was, lay down on the couch in front of the open fire until the day's excitement had subsided a little. It was almost the only evening in the week when he gave himself up to complete rest of mind and body.

He had been lying there about a quarter of an hour when Mrs. Strong, who had been moving a plant back from one of the front windows and had been obliged to raise a curtain, stepped back into the room with an exclamation.

"Phillip, there is some one talking back and forth in front of the house! I have heard the steps ever since we came home. And just now I saw a man stop and look in here. Who can it be?"

"Maybe it's the man with the burglar's lantern come back to get his knife," said Phillip, who had always made a little fun of that incident as his wife had told it. However, he rose and went over to the window. Sure enough, there was a man out on the sidewalk looking straight at the house. He was standing perfectly still.

Phillip and his wife stood by the window looking at the figure outside, and, as it did not move away, at last Phillip grew a little impatient and went to the door to open it and ask the man what he meant by staring into people's houses in that fashion.

"Now, do be careful, won't you?" entreated his wife anxiously.

"Yes. I presume it is some tramp or other wanting food. There's no danger, I know."

He flung the door wide open and called out in his clear, hearty voice:

"Anything you want, friend? Come up and ring the bell if you want to get in and know us instead of standing there on the walk catching cold and making us wonder who you are."

In response to this frank and informal invitation the figure came forward and slowly mounted the steps of the porch. As the face came into view more clearly Phillip started and fell back a little.

It was not because the face was that of an enemy nor because it was repulsive nor because he recognized an old acquaintance. It was a face he had never to his knowledge seen before. Yet the impulse to start back before it seemed to spring from the recollection of just such a countenance moving over his spirit when he was in prayer or in trouble. It all passed in a second's time, and then he confronted the man as a complete stranger.

There was nothing remarkable about him. He was poorly dressed and carried a small bundle. He looked cold and tired. Phillip, who could never resist the mute appeal of distress in any form, reached out his hand and said kindly: "Come in, my brother; you look cold and weary. Come in and sit down before the fire, and we'll have a bite of lunch. I was just beginning to think of having something to eat myself."

Phillip's wife looked a little remonstrance, but Phillip did not see it, and wheeling an easy chair before the fire he made the man sit down, and, pulling up a rocker, he placed himself opposite.

The stranger seemed a little surprised at the action of the minister, but made no resistance. He took off his hat and disclosed a head of hair white as snow and said in a voice that sounded singularly sweet and true:

"You do me much honor, sir. The fire feels good this chilly evening, and the food will be very acceptable. And I have no doubt you have a good, warm bed that I could occupy for the night."

Phillip stared hard at his unexpected guest, and his wife, who had started out of the room to get the lunch, shook her head vigorously as she stood be-

hind the visitor as a sign that her husband should refuse such a strange request. He was taken aback a little, and he looked puzzled. The words were uttered in the utmost simplicity.

"Why, yes, we can arrange that all right," he said. "There is a spare room, and—excuse me for a moment while I go and help to get our lunch." Phillip's wife was telegraphing to him to come into the other room, and he obediently got up and went.

"Now, Phillip," she whispered when they were out in the dining room, "you know that is a risky thing to do. You are all the time inviting all kinds of characters in here. We can't keep this man all night. Who ever heard of such a thing as a perfect stranger coming out with a request like that? I believe the man is crazy. It certainly will not do to let him stay here all night."

Phillip looked puzzled.

"I declare it is strange! He doesn't appear like an ordinary tramp. But somehow I don't think he's crazy. Why shouldn't we let him have the bed in the room off the east parlor. I can light the fire in the stove there and make him comfortable."

"But we don't know who he is. You let your sympathies run away with your judgment."

"Well, little woman, let me go in and talk with him awhile. You get the lunch, and we'll see about the rest afterward."

So he went back and sat down again. He was hardly seated when his visitor said:

"If your wife objects to my staying here tonight, of course, I don't wish to. I don't feel comfortable to remain where I'm not welcome."

"Oh, you're perfectly welcome," said Phillip hastily, with some embarrassment, while his strange visitor went on:

"I'm not crazy, only a little odd, you know. Perfectly harmless. It will be perfectly safe for you to keep me overnight."

The man spread his thin hands out before the fire, while Phillip sat and watched him with a certain fascination new to his interest in all sorts and conditions of men.

Mrs. Strong brought in a substantial lunch of cold meat, bread and butter, milk and fruit and then placed it on a table in front of the open fire, where he and his remarkable guest ate like hungry men.

It was after this lunch had been eaten and the table removed that a scene occurred which would be incredible if its reality and truthfulness did not compel us to record it as a part of the life of Phillip Strong. No one will wish to deny the power and significance of this event as it is unfolded in the movement of this story.

## CHAPTER XI.

"I heard your sermon this morning," said Phillip's guest while Mrs. Strong was removing the small table to the dining room.

"Did you?" asked Phillip, because he could not think of anything wiser to say.

"Yes," said the strange visitor simply. He was so silent after saying this one word that Phillip did what he never was in the habit of doing. He always shrank back sensitively from asking for an opinion of his preaching from any one except his wife. But now he could not help saying:

"What did you think of it?"

"It was one of the best sermons I ever heard. But somehow it did not sound sincere."

"What?" exclaimed Phillip almost angrily. If there was one thing he felt sure about, it was the sincerity of his preaching. Then he checked his feeling as he thought how foolish it would be to get angry at a passing tramp who was probably a little out of his mind. Yet the man's remark had a strange power over him. He tried to shake it off as he looked harder at him. The man looked over at Phillip and repeated gravely, shaking his head, "Not sincere."

Mrs. Strong came back into the room, and Phillip motioned her to sit down near him while he said, "And what makes you think I was not sincere?"

"You said the age in which we lived demanded that people live in a far simpler, less extravagant style."

"Yes, that is what I said. I believe it, too," replied Phillip, clasping his hands over his knee and gazing at his singular guest with earnestness. The man's thick white hair glistened in the open firelight like spun glass.

"And you said that Christ would not approve of people spending money for flowers, food and dress on those who did not need it when it could more wisely be expended for the benefit of those who were in want."

"Yes. Those were not my exact words, but that was my idea."

"Your idea. Just so. And yet we have had here in this little lunch, or, as you called it, a 'bite of something,' three different kinds of meat, two kinds of bread, hothouse grapes and the richest kind of milk."

The man said all this in the quietest, calmest manner possible, and Phillip stared at him, more assured than ever that he was a little crazy. Mrs. Strong looked amused and said, "You seemed to enjoy the lunch pretty well." The man had eaten with a zest that was redeemed from greediness only by a

delicacy of manner that no tramp ever possessed.

"My dear madam," said the man, "perhaps this was a case where the food was given to one who stood really in need of it."

Phillip started as if he had suddenly caught a meaning from the man's words which he had not before heard in them.

"Do you think it was an extravagant lunch then?" he asked, with a very slight laugh.

The man looked straight at Phillip and replied slowly, "Yes, for the times in which we live!"

A sudden silence fell on the group of three in the parlor of the parsonage, lighted up by the soft glow of the coal fire. No one except a person thoroughly familiar with the real character of Phillip Strong could have told why that silence fell on him instead of a careless laugh at the crazy remark of a half witted stranger tramp. Just how long the silence lasted he did not know; only, when it was broken, he found himself saying:

"Man, who are you? Where are you from? And what is your name?"

His guest turned his head a little and replied: "When you called me in here, you stretched out your hand and called me 'brother.' Just now you called me by the great term, 'man.' These are my names. You may call me 'Brother Man.'"

"Well, then, 'Brother Man,'" said Phillip, smiling a little to think of the very strangeness of the whole affair, "your reason for thinking I was not sincere in my sermon this morning was because of the extravagant lunch this evening?"

"Not altogether. There are other reasons." The man suddenly bowed his head between his hands, and Phillip's wife whispered to him: "Phillip, what is the use of talking with a crazy man? You are tired, and it is time to put out the lights and go to bed. Get him out of the house now as soon as you can."

The stranger raised his head and went on talking just as if he had not broken off abruptly.

"Other reasons. In your sermon you tell the people they ought to live less luxuriously. You point them to the situation in this town where thousands of men are out of work. You call attention to the great poverty and distress all over the world, and you say the times demand that people live far simpler, less extravagant lives. And yet here you live yourself like a prince. Like a prince," he repeated after a peculiar gesture, which seemed to include not only what was in the room, but all that was in the house.

Phillip glanced at his wife as people do when they suspect a third person being out of his mind and saw that her expression was very much like his own feeling, although not exactly. Then they both glanced around the room.

It certainly did look luxurious, even if not princely. The parsonage was an old mansion which had once belonged to a wealthy but eccentric sea captain. He had built to please himself, something after the colonial fashion, and large square rooms, generous fireplaces, with quaint mantels and tiling and hard wood floors gave the house an appearance of solid comfort that approached luxury. The church in Milton had purchased the property from the heirs, who had become involved in ruinous speculation and parted with the house for a sum little representing its real worth. It had been changed a little and modernized, although the old fireplaces still remained, and one spare room, an annex to the house proper, had been added recently. There was an air of decided comfort, bordering on luxury, in the different pieces of furniture and the whole appearance of the room.

"You understand," said Phillip, as his glance traveled back to his visitor, "that this house is not mine. It belongs to my church. It is the parsonage, and I am simply living in it as the minister."

"Yes, I understand. You, a minister, are living in this princely house while other people have not where to lay their heads."

Again Phillip felt the same temptation to anger steal into him, and again he checked himself at the thought: "The man is certainly insane. The whole thing is simply absurd. I will get rid of him. And yet!"

He could not shake off a strange and powerful impression which the stranger's words had made upon him. Crazy or not, the man had hinted at the possibility of an insincerity on his part which made him restless. He determined to question him and see if he really would develop a streak of insanity that would justify him in getting rid of him for the night.

"Brother Man," he said, using the term his guest had given him, "do you think I am living too extravagantly to live as I do?"

"Yes, in these times and after such a sermon."

"What would you have me do?" Phillip asked the question half seriously, half amused at himself for asking advice from such a source.

"Do as you preach that others ought to. Again that silence fell over the room. And again Phillip felt the same impression of power in the strange man's words.

The "Brother Man," as he wished to be called, bowed his head between his hands again, and Mrs. Strong whispered to her husband: "Now it is certainly worse than foolish to keep this up any longer. The man is evidently insane. We cannot keep him here all night. He will certainly do something terrible. Get rid of him, Phillip. This may be a trick on the part of the whisky men."

Never in all his life had Phillip been so puzzled to know what to do with a human being. Here was one, the strangest he had ever met, who had come into his house; it is true he had been invited, but once within he had

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