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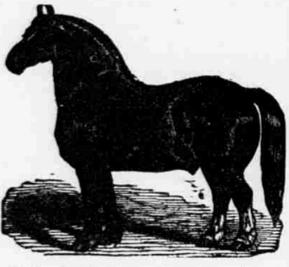
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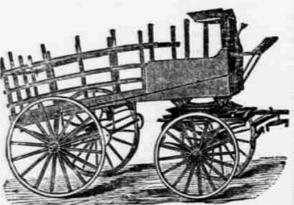
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THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG.

By REV. CHARLES M. SHELDON,

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

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rupted jumped to his feet and exclaimed:

"As I was saying, for my part if Brother Strong wishes to indulge in this eccentric action he will not have the sanction of my vote in the matter. It certainly is an entirely unheard of and uncalled for proposition."

"Mr. Strong has no doubt a generous motive in this proposed action," said a third member of the board, "but the church certainly will not approve any such step as the giving up of the parsonage. He exaggerates the need of such a sacrifice. I think we ought to reason him out of the idea."

"We called Mr. Strong to the pastorate of Calvary church," said another, "and it seems to me he came under the conditions granted in our call. For the church to allow such an absurd thing as the giving up of the parsonage to this proposed outside work would be a very unwise move."

"Yes, and more than that," said the first speaker, "I want to say very frankly that I am growing tired of the way things have gone since Mr. Strong came to us. What business has Calvary church with all these outside matters, these labor troubles and unemployed men and all the other matters that have been made the subject of preaching lately? I want a minister who looks after his own parish. Mr. Strong does not call on his own people. He has not been inside my house but once since he came to Milton. Brethren, there is a growing feeling of discontent over this matter."

There was a short pause, and then one of the members said:

"Surely if Mr. Strong feels dissatisfied with his surroundings in the parsonage or feels as if his work lay in another direction he is at liberty to choose another parish. But he is the finest pulpit minister we ever had, and no one doubts his entire sincerity. He is a remarkable man in many respects."

"Yes, but sincerity may be a very awkward thing carried too far. And in this matter of the parsonage I don't see how the trustees can allow it. Why, what would the other churches think of it? Calvary church cannot allow anything of the kind for the sake of its reputation. But I would like to hear Mr. Winter's opinion. He has not spoken yet."

The rest turned to the mill owner, who, as chairman of the board, usually had much to say and was regarded as a shrewd and careful business adviser. In the excitement of the occasion and discussion the usual formalities of a regular board meeting had been ignored.

Mr. Winter was evidently embarrassed. He had listened to the discussion of the minister with his head bent down and his thoughts in a whirl of emotion both for and against the pastor. His naturally inclined business habits contended against the proposition to give up the parsonage. His feelings of gratitude to the minister for his personal help the night of the attack by the mob rose up to defend him. There was with it all an undercurrent of self administered rebuke that the pastor had set the whole church an example of usefulness. He wondered how many of the members would voluntarily give up half their incomes for the good of humanity. He wondered in a confused way how much he would give up himself. Philip's sermon had made a real impression on him.

"There is one point we have not discussed yet," he said at last, "and that is Mr. Strong's offer of half his salary to carry on the work of a children's refuge or something of that kind."

"How can we accept such an offer? Calvary church has always believed in paying its minister a good salary and paying it promptly, and we want our minister to live decently and be able to appear as he should among the best people," replied the nervous little man who had been first to speak.

"Still, we cannot deny that it is a very generous thing for Mr. Strong to do. He certainly is entitled to credit for his unselfish proposal. No one can charge him with being worldly minded," said Mr. Winter, feeling a new interest in the subject as he found himself defending the minister.

"Are you in favor of allowing him to do what he proposes in the matter of the parsonage?" asked another.

"I don't see that we can hinder Mr. Strong from living anywhere he pleases if he wants to. The church cannot compel him to live in the parsonage."

"No, but it can choose not to have such a minister!" exclaimed the first speaker again excitedly, "and I for one am most decidedly opposed to the whole thing. I do not see how the church can allow it and maintain its self respect."

"Do you think the church is ready to tell Mr. Strong that his services are not wanted any longer?" asked Mr. Winter coldly.

"I am, for one of the members, and I know others who feel as I do if matters go on in this way much longer. I tell you, Brother Winter, Calvary church is very near a crisis. Look at the Golden and the Malverns and the Albers. They are all leaving us, and the plain reason is the nature of the preaching. Why, you know yourself

Brother Winter, that never has the pulpit of Calvary church heard such preaching on people's private affairs."

Mr. Winter colored and replied angrily: "What has that to do with this present matter? If the minister wants to live in a simpler style, I don't see what business we have to stop it. As to the disposition of the parsonage, that is a matter of business which rests with the church to arrange."

The nervous, irritable little man who had spoken often rose to his feet and exclaimed: "You can count me out of all this, then. I wash my hands of the whole affair." And he went out of the room, leaving the rest of the board somewhat surprised at his sudden departure.

They remained about a quarter of an hour longer discussing the matter, and finally, at Mr. Winter's suggestion, a committee was appointed to go and see the minister the next evening and see if he could not be persuaded to modify or change his proposition made in the morning sermon. The rest of the trustees insisted that Mr. Winter himself should act as chairman of the committee, and after some remonstrance he finally, with great reluctance, agreed to do so.

So Philip next evening, as he sat in his study mapping out the week's work and wondering a little what the church would do in the face of his proposal, received the committee, welcoming them in his bright, hearty manner. He had been notified on Sunday evening of the approaching conference. The committee consisted of Mr. Winter and two other members of the board.

Mr. Winter opened the conversation with considerable embarrassment and an evident reluctance for his share in the matter.

"Mr. Strong, we have come, as you are aware, to talk over your proposition of yesterday morning concerning the parsonage. It was a great surprise to us all."

Philip smiled a little. "Mrs. Strong says I act too much on impulse and do not prepare people enough for my statements. But one of the greatest men I ever knew used to say that an impulse was a good thing to obey instantly if there was no doubt of its being a right one."

"And do you consider this proposed move of yours a right one, Mr. Strong?" asked Mr. Winter.

"I do," replied Philip, with quiet emphasis. "I do not regret making it, and I believe it is my duty to abide by my original decision."

"Do you mean that you intend actually to move out of this parsonage?" asked one of the other members of the committee.

"Yes," Philip said it so quietly and yet so decidedly that the men were silent a moment. Then Mr. Winter said:

"Mr. Strong, this matter is likely to cause trouble in the church, and we might as well understand it frankly. The trustees believe that as the parsonage belongs to the church property and was built for the minister he ought to live in it. The church will not understand your desire to move out."

"Do you understand it, Mr. Winter?" Philip put the question point blank.

"No, I don't know that I do wholly," Mr. Winter colored and replied in a hesitating manner.

"I gave my reasons yesterday morning. I do not know that I can make them plainer. The truth is I cannot go on preaching to my people about living on a simpler basis while I continue to live in surroundings that on the face of them contradict my own convictions. In other words, I am living beyond my necessities here. I have lived all my life surrounded by the luxuries of civilization. If now I desire to give these benefits to those who have never enjoyed them or to know from nearer contact something of the bitter struggle of the poor, why should I be hindered from putting that desire into practical form?"

"The question is, Mr. Strong," said one of the other trustees, "whether this is the best way to get at it. We do not question your sincerity nor doubt



"You can count me out of all this, then," your honesty, but will your leaving the parsonage and living in a less expensive house on half your present salary help your church work or reach more people and save more souls?"

"I am glad you put it that way," exclaimed Philip, eagerly turning to the

speaker. "That is just it." Will my proposed move result in bringing the church and the minister into closer and more vital relations with the people most in need of spiritual and physical uplifting? Out of the depths of my nature I believe it will. The chasm between the church and the people in these days must be bridged by the spirit of sacrifice in material things. It is in vain for us to preach spiritual truths unless we live physical truths. What the world is looking for today are object lessons in self denial on the part of Christian people."

For a moment no one spoke. Then Mr. Winter said:

"About your proposal that this house be turned into a refuge or home for homeless children, Mr. Strong, do you consider that idea practicable? Is it business? Is it possible?"

"I believe it is, very decidedly. The number of homeless and vagrant children at present in Milton would astonish you. This house could be put into beautiful shape as a detention house until homes could be found for the children in Christian families."

"It would take a great deal of money to manage it."

"Yes," replied Philip, with a sadness which had its cause deep within him. "It would cost something. But can the world be saved cheaply? Does not every soul saved cost an immense sum, if not of money at least of an equivalent? Is it possible for us to get at the heart of the great social problem without feeling the need of using all our powers to solve it rightly?"

Mr. Winter shook his head. He did not understand the minister. His action and his words were both foreign to the mill owner's regular business habits of thought and performance.

"What will you do, Mr. Strong, if the church refuses to listen to this proposed plan of yours?"

"I suppose," answered Philip after a little pause, "the church will not object to my living in another house at my own charges?"

"They have no right to compel you to live here," Mr. Winter turned to the other members of the committee. "I said so at our previous meeting. Gentlemen, am I not right in that?"

"It is not a question of our compelling Mr. Strong to live here," said one of the others. "It is a question of the church's expecting him to do so. It is the parsonage and the church home for the minister. In my opinion it will cause trouble if Mr. Strong moves out. People will not understand it."

"That is my belief, too, Mr. Strong," said Mr. Winter. "It would be better for you to modify or change or, better still, to abandon this plan. It will not be understood and will cause trouble."

"Suppose the church should rent the parsonage then," suggested Philip. "It would then be getting a revenue from the property. That, with the thousand dollars on my salary, could be wisely and generously used to relieve much suffering in Milton this winter. The church could easily rent the house."

That was true, as the parsonage stood on one of the most desirable parts of B street and would command good rental.

"Then you persist in this plan of yours, do you, Mr. Strong?" asked the third member of the committee, who had for the most part been silent.

"Yes; I consider that under the circumstances, local and universal, it is my duty. Where I propose to go is a house which I can get for \$8 a month. It is near the tenement district and not so far from the church and this neighborhood that I need be isolated too much from my church family."

Mr. Winter looked serious and perplexed. The other trustees looked dissatisfied. It was evident they regarded the whole thing with disfavor.

Mr. Winter rose abruptly. He could not avoid a feeling of anger in spite of his obligation to the minister. He also had a vivid recollection of his former interview with the pastor in that study. And yet he struggled with the vague resistance against the feeling that Philip was proposing to do a thing that could result in only one way—of suffering for himself. With all the rest went a suppressed but conscious emotion of wonder that a man would of his own free will give up a luxurious home for the sake of any one.

"The matter of reduction of salary, Mr. Strong, will have to come before the church. The trustees cannot vote to accept your proposal. I am very much mistaken if the members of Calvary church will not oppose the reduction. You can see how it would place us in an unfavorable light."

"Not necessarily, Mr. Winter," said Philip eagerly. "If the church will simply regard it as my own great desire and as one of the ways by which we may help forward our work in Milton, I am sure we need have no fear of being put in a false light. The church does not propose this reduction. It comes from me and in a time of peculiar emergency, both financial and social. It is a thing which has been done several times by other ministers."

"That may be. Still, I am positive Calvary church will regard it as unnecessary and will oppose it."

"It will not make any difference practically," replied Philip, with a smile. "I can easily dispose of a thousand dollars where it is needed by others more than by me. But I would prefer that the church would actually pay out the money to them rather than myself."

Mr. Winter and the other trustees looked at Philip in wonder, and with a few words of farewell they left the parsonage.

CHAPTER XIV.

The following week Calvary church held a meeting. It was one of the stormiest meetings ever held by the members. In that meeting Mr. Winter again, to the surprise of nearly all, advised caution and defended the minister's action up to a certain point. The result was a condition of waiting

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