

# The Crucifixion of Philip Strong

By Rev. CHARLES M. SHELDON,  
Author of "In His Steps, What Would Jesus Do?" "Malcom Kirk," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," Etc.

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"No. But by what test are nominal Christians and church members tried today? Is not the church in America and England a church in which the scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, are just as certainly found as they were in the old Jewish church? And would not that element crucify Christ again if he spoke as plainly now as then?"

Again Philip looked out of the window. His whole nature was shaken to its foundation.

"I have made mistakes. I have been lacking in tact. I have needlessly offended the people," he said to his wife, yielding almost for the first time to a great fear and distrust of himself, for the letter asking his resignation had shaken him as once he thought impossible. "I have tried to preach and act as Christ would, but I have failed to interpret him aright. Is it not so, Sarah?"

His wife was reluctant to speak. But her true heart made answer: "No, Philip, you have interpreted him too faithfully. You may have made mistakes. All ministers do, but I honestly believe you have preached as Christ would preach against the great selfishness and hypocrisy of this century. The same thing would have happened to him."

They talked a little longer, and then Philip said:

"Let us go down and see the Brother Man. Somehow I feel like talking to him."

So they went down stairs and into the room where the invalid was sitting with the old man. William was able to walk about now and had been saying that he wanted to hear Philip preach as soon as he could get to church.

"Well, Brother Man," said Philip, with something like his old heartiness of manner, "have you heard the news? Othello's occupation's gone."

The Brother Man seemed to know all about it. Whether he had heard of it through some of the church people or not Mr. Strong did not know. He looked at Mr. Strong calmly. There was a loving sympathy in his voice, but no trace of compassion or wonder. Evidently he had not been talking of the subject to any one.

"I knew it would happen," he said. "You have offended the rulers."

"What would you do, Brother Man, in my place? Would you resign?" Philip thought back to the time when the Brother Man had asked him why he did not resign.

"Don't they ask you to?"

"Yes."

"Do you think it is the wish of the whole church?"

"No, there are some who want me to stay."

"How do you feel about it?" The Brother Man put the question almost timidly. Philip replied without hesitation:

"There is only one thing for me to do. It would be impossible for me to remain after what has been done."

The Brother Man nodded his head as if in approval. He did not seem disturbed in the least. His demeanor was the most perfect expression of peace that Philip ever saw.

"We shall have to leave this house, Brother Man," said Sarah, feeling with Philip that he did not grasp the meaning of the event.

"Yes, in the Father's house there are many mansions," replied the Brother Man. Then as Mr. and Mrs. Strong sat there in the gathering gloom the old man said suddenly, "Let us pray together about it."

He knelt down and offered the most remarkable prayer that they had ever heard. It seemed to them that, however the old man's mind might be affected, the part of him that touched God in the communion of audible prayer was absolutely free from any weakness or disease. It was a prayer that laid its healing balm on the soul of Philip and soothed his trouble into peace. When the old man finished, Philip felt almost cheerful again. He went out and helped his wife a few minutes in some work about the kitchen. And after supper he was just getting ready to go out to inquire after a sick family near by when there was a knock at the door.

It was a messenger boy with a telegram. Philip opened it almost mechanically and, carrying it to the light, read:

Alfred died at 4 p. m. Can you come?

For a second he did not realize the news. Then as it rushed upon him he staggered and would have fallen if the table had not been so close. A faintness and a pain seized him, and for a minute he thought he was falling. Then he pulled himself together and called his wife, who was in the kitchen. She came in at once, noticing the peculiar tone of his voice.

"Alfred is dead!" He was saying the words quietly as he held out the telegram.

"Dead! And you left him getting better! How dreadful!"

"Do you think so? He is at rest. I must go up there at once. They expect me." He still spoke quietly, stilling the tumult of his heart's anguish for the wife's sake. This man, his old college chum, was very dear to him. The news was terrible to him.

Nevertheless he made his preparations to go back to his friend's home. It is what either would have done in the event of the other's death. And so he was gone from Milton until after the funeral and did not return until Saturday. In those three days of absence Milton was stirred by events that grew out of the action of the

church.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

In the first place the minority in the church held a meeting and voted to ask Philip to remain, pledging him their hearty support in all his plans and methods. The evening paper, in its report of this meeting, made the most of the personal remarks that were made and served up the whole affair in sensational items that were eagerly read by every one in Milton.

But the most important gathering of Philip's friends was that of the mill men. They met in the hall where he had so often spoken, and, being crowded out of that by the great numbers, they finally secured the use of the courthouse. This was crowded with an excited assembly, and in the course of very many short speeches, in which the action of the church was severely condemned, a resolution was offered and adopted asking Mr. Strong to remain in Milton and organize an association or something of a similar order for the purpose of sociological study and agitation, pledging whatever financial support could be obtained from the working people. This also was caught up and magnified in the paper, and the town was still roused to excitement by all these reports when Philip returned home late Saturday afternoon, almost reeling with exhaustion and his heart torn with the separation from his old chum.

However, he tried to conceal his weariness from Sarah and partly succeeded. After supper he went up to his study to prepare for the Sunday. He had fully made up his mind what he would do, and he wanted to do it in a manner that would cast no reproach on his ministry, which he respected with sensitive reverence.

He shut the door and began his preparation by walking up and down, as his custom was, thinking out the details of the service, his sermon, the exact wording of certain phrases he wished to make.

He had been walking thus back and forth half a dozen times when he felt the same acute pain in his side that had seized him when he fainted in church at the evening service. It passed away, and he resumed his work, thinking it was only a passing disorder. But before he could turn again in his walk he felt a dizziness that whirled everything in the room about him. He clutched at a chair and was conscious of having missed it, and then he fell forward in such a way that he lay partly on the couch and on the floor and was unconscious.

How long he had been in this condition he did not know when he came to himself. He was thankful, when he did recover sufficiently to crawl to his feet and sit down on the couch, that Sarah had not seen him. He managed to get over to his desk and begin to write something as he heard her coming up stairs. He did not intend to deceive her. His thought was that he would not unnecessarily alarm her. He was very tired. It did not need much urging to persuade him to get to bed.

He awoke Sunday morning feeling strangely calm and refreshed. The morning prayer with the Brother Man came like a benediction to them all. Sarah, who had feared for him owing to the severe strain he had been enduring, felt relieved as she saw how he appeared. They all prepared to go to church, the Brother Man and William going out for the first time since the attack.

We have mentioned Philip's custom of coming into his pulpit from the little room at the side door of the platform. This morning he went in at the side door of the church after parting with Sarah and the others. He let Brother Man and William go on ahead a little, and then, drawing his wife to him, he stooped and kissed her. He turned at the top of the short flight of steps leading up to the side entrance and saw her still standing in the same place. Then she went around from the little court to the front of the church and went in with the great crowd already beginning to stream toward Calvary church.

No one ever saw so many people in Calvary church before. Men sat on the platform and even in the deep window seats. The spaces under the large galleries by the walls were filled mostly with men standing there. The house was crowded long before the hour of service. There were many beating, excited hearts in that audience. More than one member felt a shame at the action which had been taken and might have wished it recalled. With the great number of workmen and young people in the church there was only one feeling; it was a feeling of love for Philip and of sorrow for what had been done. The fact that he had been away from the city, that he had not talked over the matter with any one owing to his absence, the uncertainty as to how he would receive the whole thing, what he would say on this first Sunday after the letter had been written—this attracted a certain number of persons who never go inside a church except for some extraordinary occasion or in hopes of a sensation. So the audience that memorable day had some cruel people present, people who narrowly watch the faces of mourners at funerals to see what ravages grief has made on the countenance.

The organist played his prelude through and was about to stop when he saw from the glass that hung over the keys that Mr. Strong had not yet appeared. He began again at a certain measure, repeating it, and played very slowly. By this time the church was entirely filled. There was an air of expectant waiting as the organ again ceased, and still Philip did not come out. A great fear came over Mrs. Strong. She had half risen from her seat near the platform to go up and open the study door when it opened, and Philip came out.

Whatever his struggle had been in

that little room the closest observer could not detect any trace of tears or sorrow or shame or humiliation. He was pale, but that was common; otherwise his face wore a firm, noble, peaceful look. As he gazed over the congregation it fell under the fascination of his glances. The first words that he spoke in the service were strong and clear.

He began to speak very quietly and simply, as his fashion was, of the fact that he had been asked to resign his pastorate of Calvary church. He made the statement clearly, with no halting or hesitation or sentiment of tone or gesture. Then, after saying that there was only one course open to him under the circumstances, he went on to speak, as he said he ought to speak, in defense of his interpretation of Christ and his teaching:

"Members of Calvary church, I call you to bear witness today that I have tried to preach to you Christ and him crucified. I have doubtless made mistakes; we all make them. I have offended the rich men and property owners in Milton. I could not help it. I was obliged to do so in order to speak as I this moment solemnly believe my Lord would speak. I have aroused opposition because I asked men into the church and upon this platform who do not call themselves Christians, for the purpose of knowing their reasons for antagonism to the church we love. But the time has come. O my brothers, when the church must welcome to its councils in these matters that affect the world's greatest good all men who have at heart the fulfillment of the Christ's teachings.

"But the cause which more than any other has led to the action of this church has been, I am fully aware, my demand that the church members of this city should leave their possessions and go and live with the poor, wretched, sinful, hopeless people in the lower town, sharing in wise ways with them of the good things of the world. But why do I speak of all this in defense of my action or my preaching?"

Suddenly Philip seemed to feel a revulsion of attitude toward the whole of what he had been saying. It was as if there had instantly swept over him the knowledge that he could never make the people before him understand either his motive or his Christ. His speech so far had been quiet, unimpassioned, deliberate. His whole manner now underwent a swift change. People in the galleries noticed it, and men leaned out far over the railing, and more than one closed his hands tight in emotion at the sight and hearing of the tall figure on the platform.

"Yes," he said, "I love you, people of Milton, beloved members of this church. I would have opened my arms to every child of humanity here and shown him, if I could, the boundless love of his Heavenly Father. But, oh, ye would not! And yet the love of Christ! What a wonderful thing it is! How much he wished us to enjoy of peace and hope and fellowship and service! Yes, service—that is what the world needs today; service that is willing to give all—all to him who gave all to save us! O Christ, Master, teach us to do thy will! Make us servants to the poor and sinful and hopeless. Make thy church on earth more like thyself."

Those nearest Philip saw him suddenly raise his handkerchief to his lips, and then, when he took it away, it was stained with blood. But the people did not see that. And then, and then—a remarkable thing took place.

On the rear wall of Calvary church there had been painted, when the church was built, a Latin cross. This cross had been the source of almost endless dispute among the church members. Some said it was inartistic; others said it was in keeping with the name of the church and had a right place there as part of its inner adornment. Once the dispute had grown so large and serious that the church had voted as to its removal or retention on the wall. A small majority had voted to leave it there, and there it remained. It was perfectly white, on a panel of thin wood, and stood out very conspicuously above the rear of the platform. It was not directly behind the desk, but several feet at one side.

Philip had never made any allusion in his sermons to this feature of Calvary church's architecture. People had wondered sometimes that with his imaginative, poetical temperament he never had done so, especially once when a sermon on the crucifixion had thrilled the people wonderfully. It might have been his extreme sensitiveness, his shrinking from anything like cheap sensation.

But now he stepped back—it was not far—and turning partly around, with one long arm extended toward the cross as if in imagination he saw the Christ upon it, he exclaimed, "Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world! Yes,

"In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round!"

His voice suddenly ceased, he threw his arms up, and as he turned a little forward toward the congregation he was seen to reel and stagger back against the wall. For one intense, tremendous second of time he stood there with the whole church smitten into a plying, horrified, startled, motionless crowd of blanched, staring faces as his tall, dark figure towered up with outstretched arms, almost covering the very outlines of the cross, and then he sank down at its foot.

A groan went up from the audience. Several men sprang up the platform steps. Mrs. Strong was the first person to reach her husband. Two or three helmed to bear him to the front of the platform. Sarah knelt down by him. She put her head against his breast. Then she raised her face and said calmly, "He is dead."

The Brother Man was kneeling on



His tall, dark figure towered up with outstretched arms. "No," he said, with an indescribable gesture and untranslatable inflection, "he is not dead. He is living in the eternal mansions of glory with his Lord."

But the news was borne from lip to lip, "He is dead!" And that is the way men speak of the body. And they were right. The body of Philip was dead. And the Brother Man was right also, for Philip himself was alive in glory, and as they bore the tabernacle of his flesh out of Calvary church that day that was all they bore. His soul was out of the reach of humanity's selfishness and humanity's sorrow.

They said that when the funeral of Philip Strong's body was held in Milton rugged, unfeeling men were seen to cry like children in the streets. A great procession, largely made up of the poor and sinful, followed him to his wintry grave. They lingered long about the spot. Finally every one withdrew except Sarah, who refused to be led away by her friends, and William and the Brother Man. They stood looking down into the grave.

"He was very young to die so soon," at last Sarah said, with a calmness that was more terrible than bursts of grief.

"So was Christ," replied Brother Man simply.

"But, oh, Philip, Philip, my beloved, they killed him!" she cried. And at last, for she had not wept yet, great tears rolled down into the grave, and uncontrollable anguish seized her. Brother Man did not attempt to console or interrupt. He knew she was in the arms of God. After a long time he said: "Yes, they crucified him. But he is with his Lord now. Let us be glad for him. Let us leave him with the Eternal Peace."

When the snow had melted from the hillside and the first arbutus was beginning to bud and even blossom, one day some men came out to the grave and put up a plain stone at the head. After the men had done this work they went away. One of them lingered. He was the wealthy mill owner. He stood with his hat in his hand and his head bent down, his eyes resting on the words carved into the stone. They were these:

PHILIP STRONG,  
Pastor of Calvary Church.  
In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round—  
Mr. Winter looked at the incomplete line, and then, as he turned away and walked slowly back down into Milton, he said: "Yes, it is better so. We must finish the rest for him."

Ah, Philip Strong! The sacrifice was not in vain! The resurrection is not far from the crucifixion.

Near to its close rolls up the century,  
And still the church of Christ upon the earth  
Which marks the Christmas of his lowly birth  
Contains the selfish scribe and Pharisee,  
O Christ of God, exchanging gain for loss,  
Would men still nail thee to the selfsame cross?

It is the Christendom of time, and still  
Wealth and the love of it hold potent sway;  
The heart of man is stubborn to obey,  
The church has yet to do the Master's will,  
O Christ of God, we bow our souls to thee;  
Hasten the dawning of thy church to be way!

THE END.

### CLEVER, BUT SOULLESS.

One Woman's New Way in Which to Pay Social Debts.

"I don't know much of the ways of fashionable people," said a young physician not long ago, "for I am not in society, but if many society women are like one I know here in town I think I'm safer to be out of it. It was not this season, but it wasn't so long ago but that plenty of people can remember the circumstances. I had among my patients an elderly woman who lived with the daughter's family. The daughter lived, if not beyond her means, at least up to the very edge, went out a great deal and was entertained a great deal.

"The mother fell sick with a complaint which I knew would prove fatal. I did not inform the family till one day the daughter asked me to tell her frankly what her mother's condition was and just how long she could live. I told her that the old lady could not possibly last more than a fortnight. She begged me not to let anybody know how serious the case was. She didn't want her young daughters distressed, she said.

"Of course I told nobody, and just a week after that I read in the papers that Mrs. Dash, the daughter of my dying patient, had sent out invitations for a large dancing party, to be given on an evening a fortnight away. My patient did not live as long as I had expected. The day after she died I read in the papers that 'owing to the sudden death of her mother Mrs. Dash had been compelled to recall her invitations.'

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