

COMPETITIVE WORKMEN.

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON.

CHAPTER XIV.

The spring elections were approaching, and there was actually talk of putting a temperance ticket in the field! If I have succeeded in giving you any idea of the tipping habits of people about the Centre previous to the time of our story, you will understand that an advance must have been made in temperance sentiment when such an unheard-of thing could find tolerance. The interest which, in consequence of the efforts of Philip Stuart and Fritz Hettiger, had sprung up in that immediate neighborhood, had reached the outskirts of the township. It may be a matter of wonderment that these two young men, so unlike in their views and aims on other subjects, should be so united upon this one question. It was a great puzzle to Fritz that there were men, professing to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who seemed utterly indifferent to the claims which the cause of temperance had upon them. Philip Stuart had suffered through his early boyhood from the curse and carried with him always the memory of his wrongs. Very early in life he had resolved to fight the enemy. The work which he took up in this neighborhood had grown upon his hands; helpers had unexpectedly arisen and the whole town had been thoroughly canvassed, and every man had been asked, and where necessary urged, to vote the temperance ticket; and it was remarkable how many were ready to embrace the opportunity now offered for the first time. Now the time for Christy to grow in earnest had come; and night after night he held forth to the group of loungers and tipplers who hung about the bar, many of them too drunk to get away until they had slept off their intoxication by Christy's great fire. Once Christy had rolled a customer out of doors in midwinter, and the man had narrowly escaped freezing to death; his life having been saved at the expense of a foot. A suit for damages having been brought against Christy, topers were sure of being allowed to sleep off their debauches beside the fire ever since.

"It is a burning shame!" said this considerate landlord, "that these fanatics should be allowed to attack the rights and business interests of respectable people. If the principles of this party are carried out, what is to become of our business and our property? Of course, I haven't got a great deal invested in this thing, but, after all, it is of just as much consequence to me as if it were more, so long as it is all I've got. There are men who have millions invested in the same business and if this young fop of a schoolmaster could have his way, all this property would be confiscated, and the whole business destroyed."

"Ya-as," drawled old Peter Slight, "that's true! better destroy men than property, so let's keep the business going and turn souls into money! Give us a drink o' whiskey, lan'!"

The whiskey was served, and when Peter had swallowed it he began again, taking advantage of a pause in the landlord's harangue:

"That's that fellow'll lay down on the track over't the mill! Drunk, and had his head cut off! But no matter; the lan' had over there had got his house and lot and all the furniture. He was sucked dry; no more use in this world."

"Now, see here, Pete! You just stop your talk, or get out of here!" shouted Christy.

"Oh, ho, lan'! ain't I a good customer? I've got considerable property left yet. Better put up with me a spell! Time enough to bluff old Pete off when his money's all gone. You're sure to get it all if you keep cool, but if you say much I'll go over to t'other side. And when old Pete does a thing, he takes all his followers with him! 'eh, boys!" with a sly wink to the lookers-on.

"That's so! go ahead! we're with you!" shouted two or three half-drunk fellows. "I know you'll stay by me, boys," continued Peter; "we've rubbed through a good deal together, haven't we? and if you only stand by old Pete he will stand firm for whiskey; but when you go back on him he will just go in with the temperance folks. And I tell you, Christy, your argument about rights won't hold. You've got no right to sell whiskey to me; but you've got the law, and you've got my inclination to drink,

and I reckon you'll hold on your way a spell yet. But you've no business to talk about rights. I've studied this 'ere thing up. I don't s'pose I'll ever stop drinking. But if I was a young fellow like Elmer here, I'd stop. I tell you, young fellow, you'd better go and hang yourself in your father's barn than grow to be a drunkard."

At last the landlord was angry. Even such a privileged person as old Peter Slight could not be allowed to go too far, and he thundered:

"Now, I tell you to stop that talk! I won't have it in my house!"

"Pretty business yours must be," returned Peter, "if 'twon't a stand having the truth told about it!"

"Of course there was an uproar; some cried out:—
"Put the fellow out!" others, "You're right, Peter, go ahead!" But Christy was enraged, and, with a torrent of oaths, ordered Peter Slight out of his house.

"All right," said Peter, "only mind this; if I go out now, not another drop of your liquor will I drink, and you may as well not get your eye on that little house of mine; good-night to you all!" And old Peter Slight, half drunk, staggered out and home at nine o'clock, to the utter amazement of his wife. For two or three days he was scarcely seen outside his own house, though Christy prophesied that he would be back. Two evenings later he put in an appearance at the temperance meeting. When he found an opportunity, he rose and said, in his drawing way:

"I'd like to jine your s'd'ity. Rather reckon old Pete kin keep a promise. Never broke one in my life. Made a sort o' promise to serve sixan years ago and kept it faithful; but t'other night one of his gens went back on me, and now I'm going to quit him! I mean business! I ain't a very respectable member of s'd'ity, but you fellows profess to be a elewating s'd'ity, and I'm sure old Pete wants to be elewated."

I can give you no idea of the effect of this odd speech. On the faces of some was written disgust, on others utter incredulity, and all looked to their President to see what he would do with this intruder and disturber of the good order of their meeting. Before he could respond, the man spoke again:

"Maybe you think I'm drunk; but I give you my word of honor,—here a laugh went around,—that I hain't drank a drop o' liquor for forty-eight hours. The last drink I took was at twenty minutes before nine night before last. Put that down, Mr. Secretary; it may be interesting for future reference."

Mr. Stuart said: "Mr. Slight, 'so unswayed was the man to his name with 'Mr.' prefixed, that he looked around to see who was being addressed;—"we receive you into our land gladly and cordially, upon your subscribing to the pledge and by-laws. And allow me to congratulate you upon having broken away from the monster vice. We welcome you, both your own sake, and because we need your help in the war we are waging against the evil. I trust you will prove a valiant soldier."

After the formal meeting was over, Peter came forward and wrote his name in a trembling, scrawling hand, and, as he did so, remarked:

"Them's thinks I ain't going to stick to this is going to be disappointed!"

And now before I have done with him, let me say that there is in the prohibition ranks to-day no more earnest or efficient worker than Peter Slight. If there had not been a temperance organization in the neighborhood he might have been saved, but it may be doubted. And this threat of taking his followers with him was, in a measure, carried out. Several broke away from the power that had held them captive, and went over to the other side. Christy threatened vengeance upon the temperance people. He swore and fumed and ranted about the rights of the liquor dealers, the protection of the law, and the legitimacy of the business. He declared that whatever might be the issue of the election, he would sell liquor in spite of everything. As the day drew nearer the excitement increased. There were just three people who seemed to expect that the victory would be with the temperance party. Mr. Stuart always expected that whatever enterprise he was engaged in would be a success, while Fritz believed that the Lord would fight this battle for them; and Janet Fleming, eager, anxious and hopeful, would not think of failure.

"Papa, what do you think?" It was Ernest Wilson who asked the question. "Will the temperance people win?"

"O yes!" said Mr. Wilson, laughing. "I expect that it will be like the school-house and everything that Mr. Stuart has undertaken since he came here. He seems to have the knack of winding people around his finger."

"And Fritz is helping him," said Ernest. "Again Mr. Wilson laughed.

"And my boy thinks Fritz goes a little ahead of everybody else, even Mr. Stuart?"

"Well, you know Fritz prays, and I think that helps the most."

The father's smile was very tender as he replied:

"Yes, Ernest, I am sure that it helps; and I believe that if we win it will be in answer to prayer for God's blessing on our work."

Every legitimate means was employed to further the project. Temperance lectures, temperance debates and temperance societies were held. Books, papers and leaflets were freely distributed while personal effort was unwearied. Every temperance man, woman and child turned into a temperance lecturer to audiences varying from one to hundreds. Months before Philip Stewart said:

"I believe that by earnest, united, systematic effort we can carry this town for no license!" and even then influences had been set at work which, operating quietly, almost silently upon the hearts and minds of the people, had prepared the way for the more active efforts to be put forth at the proper time, so that the work was well-nigh accomplished before the liquor party realized what was going on in their midst, and though, when aroused to opposition, they fought sharply, the temperance forces were too well organized and too thoroughly in earnest to be driven from the field. The most of them had "enlisted for the war," and whether victory came soon or was long deferred, they were determined to fight it out.

They said: "We hardly expect to win this year, but we shall have a large minority vote, which will give us a foundation to work upon in the future; after this we mean to be recognized as a power, in this town at least. The rum party may be well understood that we are not to be put down by sneers, nor by threats, and that sooner or later, we shall win."

Well, they did win! and I think they were almost as much surprised as the opposing party, but not so surprised that they did not know how to take their victory. Oh, no! they knew how to celebrate it in public by the ringing of the church bells, and the thunder of cannon and loud hurrahs, and in their homes, according to individual tastes and customs, with feasts and laughter, and tears and songs of triumph, and mutual congratulations; and in their closets, with prayers of thanksgiving and praise.

Of course, there were those who said: "Oh, well, it won't amount to anything; it all grew out of that schoolmaster's trying to do something smart, but they'll never carry it out. There'll be just as much liquor sold as ever. The men who want it will have an opportunity to get it without going out of town for it, never fear."

But when it was found that the hotel bars and the saloons were closed, and that they were never re-opened, these croak 's concluded to retire into the background, and to-day Milford Township stands among the few whose inhabitants know the blessedness of freedom from the thralldom of the liquor traffic in their midst.

CHAPTER XV.

"And you expect me to do that!" Flavius St. John asked indignantly as he stood, notebook and pencil in hand, making a memorandum of the various commissions with which he was about to be entrusted by Josephine. That young lady had returned home and was busy with preparations for her marriage, and it was to further these arrangements that Flavius was going into the city that morning. He asked the question much as if he had said, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this?" and Josephine said:

"Why, I suppose so! I thought you were going in to order the things."

"So I supposed, but you'll have to get some other fellow to order out your liquors! I haven't got so low yet."

"Oh, now Flavius, don't get on stilts!"

"But Josie, you won't really think of having wine?"

"Most assuredly I will think of it, and have it too!"

"Josephine, I don't understand you! You used to be a strong temperance advocate!"

"So I am now! I don't believe in saloons and licenses, and drinking whiskey, any more than you do, but pure wines are different. They are not harmful, and they are quite indispensable to an elegant collation. No one in the first circles would think of having a wedding without wines."

"Then I'm thankful I'm not in the first circles!" said Flavius.

"Now Flavius, you are horrid!"

"Indeed! Yet you'll condescend to make use of me to do your errands."

"Of course, if you'll do them."

"I'll do anything but that."

"And you won't do that?"

"I will not!"

Josephine was angry, but Flavius stood firm. Finally the question was settled in an unexpected manner. Mr. St. John, learning of the dispute, remarked:

"There is no need of quarrelling about the matter. There will be no wine ordered."

"But, father, I am going to have wine at my wedding!"

Mr. St. John shook his head. "No Josephine, I cannot consent."

In vain did Josephine plead; her father was determined, and even Mrs. St. John failed to overcome his opposition.

"I made a promise to Lena before she died, and I mean to keep it. If Josie can't get the knot tied without the help of wine she will have to break off the match. And I shouldn't wonder if it would be the best thing she could do."

When Mr. Morgan heard of the troubles of his betrothed over this question, he consoled her by saying:

"Never mind, I'll fix it. We'll have wine at our wedding in spite of them!"

Refreshments for the occasion, ordered from the city, arrived in charge of the waiters for the day, and how was Mr. St. John to know or even suspect that among the various packages, baskets and hamper was a case of choice wine? But Mr. Morgan quite miscalculated as to the shrewdness of his prospective father-in-law.

There was no wine served at Josephine St. John's wedding. A triumphant expression rested on Mr. St. John's face as he stuffed certain curious-looking bits of kindling wood under the great boiler in which was the coffee for the wedding collation. And out in the backyard might have been found a heap of broken bottles and a pool of darkish colored liquid. Of course, there was something of a commotion among the waiters, shared by Mr. Morgan, but as no one else was supposed to be in the secret, and search for the missing hamper proving unavailing, they concluded it must have been left behind, though the head waiter declared he saw it packed with the other things. And Mr. Morgan had a suspicion that he had been outwitted.

In the elegant home of which Josephine found herself the mistress, wine was invariably served at dinner. Flavius was not surprised to find it so upon his first visit to his sister, not surprised, but sorry, and he took occasion to say to Josephine:

"Josie, what if father should come in to dine with you? I mean about the wine."

"Why, I suppose the servants would fill his glass if he allowed it. We should not force a guest to drink wine. I believe you have been allowed perfect liberty in that respect," said Josephine, haughtily.

"But Josie, you remember how father used to be? And would you dare to tempt him now?"

"Oh Flavius, you are so tiresome! Of course I know that father used to drink a great deal of cider, and that it made him cross, but I don't propose to offer him cider. Why, that is such a common drink! It is quite vulgar! Wine is a very different thing. Of course, my father will be quite at liberty to do as he chooses whenever he comes to see us, but I shall not be frightened into hysterics if he should drink to my health."

"Oh, Josie!"

"Now, see here! I don't want you to come here to preach. Mr. Morgan and I will manage our house as we judge to be proper, and we shall always be glad to welcome you for any length of time. Mr. Morgan told me that he wished my family to feel quite at home with us. But I have decided as to what is proper in regard to this matter of having wine on our table, and I will not listen to any preaching."

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