

COMPETITIVE WORKMEN.

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON.

CHAPTER XII.

The Stuart mansion was very gay during the holidays. Mrs. Stuart, having no daughters of her own, was delighted at having like Josephine as a centre-piece in her little companies of young people, with which she was wont to fill her house during the holidays. As for Josephine, she was plunged into a series of gayeties undreamed of. Dinner parties and evening parties, operas and theatres, dancing parties and card parties filled up the hours, until Josephine wondered how she had existed hitherto in the quiet ways of the old home at the Centre. What the sudden accession of comparative wealth and her mother's folly had failed to accomplish, was likely to be brought about through the mistaken kindness of her new friend, and the admiration and attention of young Morgan.

Strange, what conflicting influences were contending for the control of the life of Josephine St. John. She had drifted along in a sluggish sort of way for sixteen years of her life. Then Philip Stuart came, and her intellect was awakened. As with Helena and Flavius, she began to study with a purpose. A lofty ambition took possession of her, and she dreamed of high intellectual attainments. Then Helena's sickness and death, with its softening impressions, and Fritz Hettinger's helpful visits through that trying time and the months of darkness that followed, seemed to be leading her heavenward, and the services in the old church and the Sunday-school all tended to the development of the spiritual side of her nature. In those first months after Lena's death, Josephine was almost persuaded to follow Christ; but as often as she was on the point of decision some word of unbelief, or look of scorn, or some sophistry which seemed to her an unanswerable argument, held her back. Philip Stuart was wont to say that he never opposed religion; but I think that the enemy of souls was satisfied with his work so far as Flavius and Josephine St. John were concerned. And thus the temptations which assailed the young girl in the new life into which she was so suddenly thrown, found her unfortified. She belonged to the Temperance Society at the Centre. She was overjoyed when her father gave up his cider, but she had not strength to refuse the glass of wine which young Morgan brought to her at an evening party, nor the brandy sauce which came to Mrs. Stuart's table as the accompaniment of the Christmas pudding, with its flame of burning alcohol. When Mr. Morgan asked her to make up a party at which, she could not refuse to allow him to teach her the mysteries of the game. Neither could she decline his invitation to ride on Sabbath afternoon, though her mother had always been particular in regard to the observance of the Sabbath.

This Mr. Morgan was coming to have a strong influence over her life. He never ridiculed religion, never scoffed, and never argued against the truth of the gospel. He ignored the whole subject. Very likely he would have sneered and argued if he had found occasion, but that part of the work had already been well done. "He did sneer at the temperance fanatic," who, because some people would make fools and brutes of themselves, would deprive everybody of the privilege of deciding for themselves what was right and proper to do." Against the pledge he used the old argument about "signing away one's liberty," and "making promises to be broken," and "showing one's weakness," and against temperance workers he hurled the epithets of "fanatics," "fools," and "meddlers," and blamed them for interfering with a man's lawful business; and so dressing up his sneers and false assertions with fine sounding phrases, and with sophisms, that Josephine thought him very wise and was quite ready to adopt his opinions.

During holiday week, Mrs. Stuart said, "Josie dear, suppose you write a note to your brother, and ask him to come and stay a day or two with you here. My nephew will be very glad to entertain him, and it will be pleasant for you. You have been so good to stay and keep an old woman company that you ought to have some of your family here for a little while."

"Thank you," said Josephine. "Dear Mrs. Stuart, you are so very kind to me! I know Flavius will be glad to come."

The letter was written, and a day or two before New Year's Flavius appeared. Mrs. Stuart was charmed with the young man. "Why, really," she said, "your brother is very nice. Of course, being your brother, I expected him to be passable; but I can't understand how you two, brought up in that out-of-the-way place, have gained so much of what we call style. Can you explain it, dear?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Josephine, laughing; "you know I had a chance to learn something at Madame Dorsey's before I met you, and I suppose I took to it naturally; and, as for Flavius, I think he has learned a great deal from our teacher at home. Flavius and—and?"

Josephine hesitated over the name, as she remembered Mr. Morgan's advice never to mention Philip Stuart to her friends here, and she finally avoided it by saying "this gentleman," and finished her sentence—

"Flavius and this gentleman are very great friends."

"Ah!" was Mrs. Stuart's reply. At dinner Flavius refused the wine, and looked his surprise at seeing Josephine sip hers, though sparingly. No one remarked Flavius' omission, except that Mr. Stuart remarked pleasantly—

"Ah, you haven't learned that accomplishment yet. Well, it is no harm not to learn too early; but your sister here is taking on the ways of the world very readily."

"So I perceive," said Flavius, with a meaning glance at the young lady, who, however, did not look at him.

After dinner when he saw her alone, Flavius began—

"Josephine, I am surprised at you. How does it happen that you drink wine?"

"Oh, you have to, here in the city!" replied the sister.

"I don't understand why you should break your promise because you are in the city," persisted Flavius.

"Why, because one can't be rule."

"Rule! I'd rather be considered rule than to touch the wine-glass."

"You think so now; but wait till you see everybody else drinking it."

"It won't make any difference to me if all the world drink wine; I shall not. And it so happens that I have good company in my resolve. But Josie, what would Mr. Stuart say?"

The girl turned upon him almost angrily. "What has Mr. Stuart to do with it? It is none of his business whether I drink wine or not. And Flavius, I want to tell you not to mention his name here. He treated his uncle dreadfully, and they never speak of him. I was never so surprised in all my life as I was to hear that Mr. Stuart would do a dishonorable thing."

"Of course, while I am here I shall not speak of him; but nothing can make me believe that Philip Stuart could be dishonorable," declared the young man.

"Oh, of course, you think he is perfect! But you will find that there are other people in the world. And as for drinking a little wine, I may as well tell you that I have changed my mind about it. I don't see any reason why I should be a fanatic, and make myself conspicuous in society, and I advise you to do as the rest do while you are here."

"Never!"

Josephine smiled and thought, though she did not say it, "Wait until Mr. Morgan gets hold of you."

But she miscalculated the power of persuasion in the one, and the power of resistance in the other.

New Year's morning Mr. Morgan came to take Flavius on a round of calls. I think I mentioned in the early part of this history that Flavius St. John needed only the accessories which money gives to make him acceptable to general society. And Josephine was quite proud of her brother as she watched him go down the street, arm-in-arm with one of society's favorites. Mr. Stuart came home from his round of calls early.

"Well, Miss Josie," he said, "I have called at several houses where your brother has been introduced, and everywhere I heard his praises. You have a brother to be proud of, and I guess he will come home sober, which is more than can be said of a number of young fellows whom I have seen to-day."

Flavius came in somewhat later, and alone.

"Where is Morgan?" asked Mrs. Stuart; "I thought he would be here for dinner."

"I left him at his rooms," replied Flavius.

"Used up, I suppose!" said Mr. Stuart, laughing. "You seem to have held out pretty well."

Then at dinner Mr. Stuart urged a glass of wine upon his guest.

"You have had a hard day, young man. You need something to set you up again."

"Thank you, but I will take only a cup of coffee," said Flavius.

And to this resolution he adhered in spite of the urging of his host. And Josephine was forced to the conclusion that Mr. Morgan's power was less than she had calculated.

And this is what the two young men said of each other, in substance.

"Josie," said Flavius, the first time he was alone with his sister, "if I were in your place I wouldn't have much to do with Mr. Morgan. He was drunk last night and that is why he didn't come to dinner. Of course, his uncle knew what was the matter, but I am not sure that his aunt suspected. Of course while you are a guest here you must treat him politely, but have as little to do with him as possible."

Josephine flushed angrily.

"It is horrid of you to talk about my friends! And when he has taken so much pains to entertain you, too!"

As for his being drunk, that is a horrid, coarse word to use! Likely he was exhausted with the day's work. You must remember that the day's work that is a horrid, coarse word to use!

And in the evening, when Mr. Morgan came to call, he said to Josephine (Mrs. Stuart having invited Flavius to go to a concert with her, thus leaving the way clear to Mr. Morgan's spending the evening with Josephine):

"That brother of yours is a fine fellow but he is ridiculously strict in his notions; rather inconveniently so. Why, yesterday, he would not touch a glass of wine though I took him to Governor Saybrook's and Senator Howell's and several other places, where it seemed rude to decline. Can't you take him in hand and persuade him not to make himself a laughing stock by adhering to such old-fashioned notions."

Josephine flushed as she said:

"I'll try; but Flavius is very obstinate, and he is so much under the influence of one of his friends that I do not think I could influence him at all."

"You see, if a young man expects to be received into the best society, he must conform to its customs. Of course I was very glad to introduce your brother to my friends, and it is only for his own sake and yours that I care about his ridiculous whim. Of course I know who the friend is to whom you refer; the contemptible pretender. The idea of his putting notions into a young fellow's head, to ruin his chances in life."

Now it is a great wonder that Josephine did not laugh at the idea of her brother's chances in life being ruined by his declining to get drunk! For though Mr. Morgan did not put it that way, this is what it amounted to. But she was so infatuated that her companion's words seemed to be fraught with wisdom!

The next evening they were going to a party, and before they left the house Josephine said to her brother:

"Flavius, I do hope you won't do anything to make yourself conspicuous to-night. Mr. Morgan says it is not in good taste to make one's self the object of remark."

"Hang Mr. Morgan!" was Flavius' not very polite ejaculation. "Seems to me, Josephine, that you quote that fellow rather freely."

"That fellow! Seems to me that you might speak respectfully of my friends," said Josephine.

"I don't know why I should speak more respectfully of any one than I feel," returned Flavius.

"I can tell you why. I did not expect to tell you yet, but I may as well do so. Last night Mr. Morgan asked me to marry him, and I promised to do so."

"Josephine St. John!"

"Well, you seem astonished."

"So I am! Why Josie, you are only a child; only a schoolgirl!"

"My dear brother, I am seventeen! And do you know how old our mother was when she was married? She was younger than I am! And, besides, we don't expect to be married right away, but I thought I'd

letter tell you, so that you may see the importance of speaking well of your future brother-in-law."

"I shall speak as well of him as he deserves," retorted Flavius, angrily. Then more tenderly: "Josie, how could you make such a rash promise?"

"It wasn't rash. I had contemplated it for twenty-four hours!"

"But I suppose you will not consider it a positive engagement until father and mother have consented?"

"Oh, they are all right! At least mother advised me to do this very thing some time ago. That is what she sent me to the city for, to make a rich match; and they all say Mr. Morgan is bound to be rich!"

Flavius turned away with a sullen face, but Josephine recalled him.

"You didn't promise what I asked?"

"That I would not make myself a subject of remark? I suppose that means that you want me to make a fool of myself, and perhaps be brought in dead drunk, or perhaps carried to a station house, for you wouldn't want me brought here! No, thank you! I have taken my stand upon the question, and, though I am sorry that it is disagreeable to you, I will not be moved."

The evening after Flavius and Josephine held the conversation to which I have referred was the last one they were to spend together. Flavius was to go home the next day, after escorting Josephine back to Madame Dorsey's.

They were spending the evening at home. Mr. Morgan was there, and Flavius succeeded in hiding his antipathy so far as to be able to treat that gentleman politely. As they were talking of the arrangements for the next day, Mrs. Stuart said:

"Josephine, dear, I have added a basket to your luggage; I think you will find the contents useful."

Josephine looked up inquiringly.

"It is only a few bottles of wine. I know ours is excellent, and you will find that you can study a great deal better if you take a little of it now and then. You will be worn out before spring unless you can keep yourself up in some way."

Flavius was the picture of amaze, but he soon recovered himself sufficiently to enter a mild protest:

"Mr. Stuart," he said, "do you think it safe for a young girl to begin the use of stimulants? It seems to me that we young people, at any rate, ought to have vitality enough to get along without alcohol."

"Oh, my dear girl, there is only a small percentage of alcohol in these light wines; not more than seven or eight percent, I suppose, and that is no more than is needed. Why, I'll warrant you that Josie's room-mate has an array of bottles of so-called medicine, any one of which contains as large a percent as this wine."

"Jamacia ginger, for instance," said young Morgan, laughing, "or hop bitters. You need not be afraid, Mr. St. John, of your sister, if she can't be persuaded to substitute the wine bottle for the patent medicine bottle. I warrant you she will not get more stimulant than her room-mate will out of her doses, and find it a great deal more palatable."

"But I am not sure that either of them is necessary," said Flavius.

"O yes! I ascertain amount of stimulant is necessary. The vital forces of respiration and circulation cannot be kept in perfect working order without something of the sort. Especially in this climate, where colds and sudden chills are common, a stimulant is necessary to set the retarded forces into a quicker motion and keep them going until Nature asserts herself."

Now Flavius did not believe a word of this, but he did not know how to answer the argument, because he had never studied the subject. If he had read Dr. Richardson's Lectures, and one or two other works in the same line, he might have been better prepared to reply to the unsound arguments of Mr. Morgan. But for fear of being worsted in a discussion upon a subject of which he knew little, he was silent.

Flavius was like a great many people who have views and very decided opinions about things, and have reasons for their opinions which are satisfactory to themselves, but which are not sufficiently defined for others to be able to give those reasons to them. A little time spent in formulating one's ideas may prove very profitable. It is always well to be able to give to every man a reason for the faith that is in us.

Josephine went back to Madame Dorsey's