

COMPETITIVE WORKMEN.

BY FAYE HENNINGTON.

CHAPTER X.

True to her resolution made down among the currant bushes that July morning, Jane Fleming set about shaping into words her reasons for including cider and home-made wines in the temperance pledge. Fred, coming to the house one bright sunny afternoon, found Janet in her old place on the back stoop, her lap full of papers and pamphlets, and her mind full of the subject.

"Now, see here, Fred," she began, "I can't find out that there is a bit of difference between the alcohol that is found in cider and wine and that which is found in brandy and whiskey. And cider contains from five-and-a-half to ten per cent of alcohol. Just think of the quantity of alcohol that John Blake pours down his throat in a day! He drinks the hardest kind of cider, too."

John Blake was one of those men to be found in every farming district who work out by the day—men who are always called upon by farmers as extras. Janet found that he was engaged at Mr. Wilson's.

"I don't like to have him work at Mr. Wilson's," Mrs. Blake had said; "Mr. Wilson is a real nice man; but he lets John have all the cider he wants; and his cider is awful hard, too. He comes home every night drunk on it."

Mr. Wilson was husking his corn in the field, and every morning John Blake went out with his jug filled, and came back to refill it whenever it was empty. Usually he went to the cellar and helped himself; but for some reason best known to himself, that afternoon he ordered Mrs. Wilson's servant girl to go down cellar and draw the cider for him. Bridget refused in no very gentle terms. Mr. Wilson happened to be in Ernest's room with his wife. Coming to the door, Blake denounced the girl in loud, angry tones, hurling out the vilest epithets. Mr. Wilson stepped forward, and in very decided words ordered him to be quiet. The man became perfectly frantic. He leaped forward, and would have seized Mr. Wilson had not that gentleman been too quick for him. It was a cool day, and a fire was burning upon the hearth in Ernest's room, and some billets of wood lay in the corner. Mr. Wilson seized one of these, and at the second attempt at an assault he felled the man to the floor. Bridget had meantime retreated to the pantry and bolted the door. Blake fell backward into the outer room, and Mrs. Wilson immediately closed and locked the door. The next moment the man had risen from the floor, and he was heard cursing, and throwing the chairs about, threatening vengeance upon Bridget, with now and then a curse thrown in for Mr. Wilson. Mr. Wilson passed through the hall and out at the front door, to call the men in from the field to assist in overcoming the madman.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Wilson, knowing that Blake was fond of her, thought that she could quiet him; and being a fearless woman, as soon as she could quiet Ernest, who clung to her, she opened the door. She was impelled to do this through fear that Bridget, by her screams in her terror, would betray her hiding place, and that Blake would break open the door, and perhaps kill the girl. So opening the door, she confronted him.

"John!" she said, in a soft voice. "I'll kill that Irish jade!" she shouted. "I wouldn't hurt a hair in your head, Mrs. Wilson; but that Bridget! the impudent hussy! I'll kill her if I get a chance!" And now with a trade of angry words he tore around the room.

"If I can't kill her, I'll kill myself!" And to her unspeakable horror she saw that he had seized upon Mr. Wilson's razor, and stepping to the glass, he was barring his throat, when she darted forward.

"John, I know you won't hurt me! and now, for my sake—for my sake, John—don't do this dreadful thing! don't!" And with that she sunk to the floor, having fainted. At this Blake threw away the razor, and stood looking down at the prostrate woman.

"Is she dead? is she dead?" he almost screamed in his horror. And Mr. Wilson coming in with Fritz at that moment, Blake ran out of the house, eluding the grasp of the two men who were following, Mr. Wilson and Fritz in their anxiety having outrun the others. Mrs. Wilson soon recovered.

"Did he kill himself?" she asked, as soon as she could speak. "No; but he has almost killed you!" said Mr. Wilson. "The wretch!"

Blake went home, and for several days did not appear outside his own house. What his wife and children suffered in the mean time no one knew. Mr. Wilson went once to get him to return to his work, but he refused to see him. Finally, Mrs. Wilson sent him a message. He sent back word:

"Tell Mrs. Wilson that I don't hold any grudge against her, and I wouldn't hurt a hair in her husband's head, for her sake. But that Bridget! I'm afraid I'd kill her, if I went back."

His wife said: "He just sits around and drinks cider. I'll be thankful when he gets that barrel emptied!"

After a few days he went back to the cider-mill to work, and for a week or two things seemed to be going better, though he was cross and moody. One morning he did not get up. His wife, leaving the best the house afforded on the table for his breakfast when he should see fit to get up and eat it, took her two little children and went to a neighbor's for a day's washing. Several times during the day she said to the woman for whom she was at work:

"I don't know but I ought to go home and see how John is." And once she added, "But I am afraid."

"Why, what do you mean? What are you afraid of?" asked her kind neighbor.

"I don't know; only I am afraid. I suppose I'll have to go to-night. But I dread it. I don't know why. I am not afraid of him; I can generally manage to quiet him; but I do dread to go home."

"My husband will go home with you to-night," said the woman.

"Oh, I wouldn't dare to have him! It would make John so angry if he thought I was afraid."

"But we could make an errand for him. I will give you something that will be too heavy for you to carry."

"But he might suspect. John is awful sharp. No; I'll go alone. I don't know what makes me so silly about it."

Now shall I tell it? Would that I might pass over this terrible event. It is not a pleasant thing to read about, and perhaps you will wish I had left it out. But it is true, and is essential to my story, this history of John Blake. Remember, he had been brought up in that neighborhood. He had as a boy sucked cider through a straw at the old mill; he had gone on drinking cider; he had never drank anything stronger; to use his own words, he had never yet come to the "finishing rooms;" he found plenty of cider at the houses of his employers in the neighborhood. Every year he managed to work in the mill long enough to lay in his store of cider for the winter, and every year he increased the quantity, until, as we have shown you by the scene in Mr. Wilson's kitchen, he had become cider crazy. The end ought not to have surprised any of the people of the Centre. The sight that awaited the poor wife, as she entered the house, was a dreadful one.

The breakfast which she had prepared with so much pains was scattered about the room, where he had evidently thrown it in his frenzied anger at its meagreness. Passing into the bedroom, with a sickening horror chilling her life blood, she saw a sight which will never leave her as long as she lives.

Weltering in his own blood, John Blake lay upon the bed with a horrible gash in his throat! Dead by his own hand! The victim of a cider jug!

When the terrible fact became known, think you that Janet Flemming needed any further fact or argument to present when she would prove her point?

And yet it is true that cider, which is sold and drunk as a beverage, is still made at the mill in the Hollow.

However, they neither make it nor drink it, nor furnish it to their help at the Wilson's.

CHAPTER XI.

Meantime, how fared our friends, the St. Johns?

Since the death of her beautiful daughter, Mrs. St. John had fallen into a state of melancholy fretfulness, very trying to those around her. Now that Lena had gone, there seemed to the poor woman very little that was worth living for, very little that was worth doing at all. If Josephine suggested any improvements or changes in the household arrangements, her mother would say:

"Oh, never mind; if Lena had lived, she

would have been interested, and we would have enjoyed it together; but it isn't worth while to trouble about it now." Instead of being drawn to her surviving children, and being more gentle and tender in her manner towards them, she seemed almost to forget that they had any claims upon her. She spent her days lamenting her loss, and blaming first one and then another as the cause of "poor Lena's sickness." She blamed the trustees for not sooner providing a better school-house; she blamed Mr. Stuart for rousing Lena's ambition, "making her study too hard," she said, and she blamed the father and sister and brother of the dead girl for various fancied neglects. She would not see Mr. Stuart at all when he came to the house, and the only person she cared to talk to was Fritz Hettinger. It was Fritz who had been a help and comfort to Helena in her last hours, and the sad-hearted mother would talk to him by the hour of her lost one. If Fritz grew weary of her repetitions, he never manifested it, and when Josephine would say, "Come again soon, your visits do mother so much good," and with a wistful look on her face, she would add, "and do us all good," Fritz's eyes would sparkle, and a glow would come into his cheeks that sometimes made Josephine wonder.

Mr. St. John had changed no less than his wife, but in another way. He had never gone back to his cider-mug, and had entirely forsaken the group of loungers in Christy's bar-room. He had spasms of industry, during which he made some repairs about the house and barns. The fields and stock certainly looked better than ever before, and altogether things were more comfortable; though it could scarcely be expected that the man would throw off the habits of years at once. Still he had aroused himself somewhat, and realized that Josephine, at least, was striving after better things; and he was desirous of helping her, though he did not know just how to do it.

But an event occurred early in the autumn which brought in its train greater changes to the family. Mrs. St. John's father died, and before his death he sent for his disinherited daughter, and with his forgiveness reinstated her in her rights as a daughter of the house; and Mrs. St. John came back from the funeral and the reading of the will in a new suit of handsome mourning, fully alive to her own importance as heiress to what seemed to her almost fabulous wealth. In fact, her share of her father's estate would be sufficient to pay off the mortgage on the farm, and this over and above a sum which had been bequeathed to the children to be used for their education. And this is how it came about that Josephine was busy, as the winter drew near, with preparations for leaving home. Flavius had decided to remain and continue his studies with Mr. Stuart, hoping to be ready for college in a year. But Josephine would enter Madame Dorsey's seminary as a parlor boarder. This was Mrs. St. John's idea, as she was sure that "the most that Josie needed was to see something of good society." It was fortunate for Josephine that she was made of good stuff, else her head must have been completely turned. Mrs. St. John's sole thought seemed to be to get her daughter away as soon as possible, and she spared no pains in getting up her outfit; though she lamented often and loudly that "poor dear Lena" could not have been spared to share in the honors and comforts which their newly-acquired wealth brought.

Josephine soon found herself a favorite at Madame Dorsey's. She was pretty and bright, and dressed well, besides having plenty of pocket money; and what more does a school girl require in order to be popular? She soon made some very pleasant friends outside the seminary, and strangely enough, found herself walking into the good graces of the lady out of whose house Philip Stuart had walked so abruptly a year previous.

Mrs. Stuart, meeting the young girl one of Madame Dorsey's receptions, had taken a fancy to her, and learning in the course of a conversation with her that Mrs. St. John's maiden name was Lucy Bellingier, she exclaimed:

"What! Lucy Bellingier, of Belleville?"

"Yes, ma'am; my Grandfather Bellingier lived at Belleville."

"And you are Lucy Bellingier's daughter! Why, I used to go to school with your mother; we used to sit together, and were as fond of each other as ever school girls were. I can't make it seem true; but I see that you have Lucy's eyes. Child, you must

come and see me. I am going to talk to Madame Dorsey about it."

Of course, Madame Dorsey could scarcely refuse any request of Mrs. Stuart, whose husband was the senior partner of the great firm of Stuart and Meigs, so it came about that Josephine was free to go as often as she liked to the home of her new friend, and as she had numerous invitations, she was much with her. Mrs. Stuart was continually sending the carriage for Miss St. John, with her compliments to Madame: "Could she spare her pupil for a few hours to meet a few friends?" or, "Mr. Stuart was away for a day or two, could Miss St. John be allowed to spend the time with a lonely old woman, out of pure benevolence?" The excuses were never wanting, and always served to satisfy the conscience of Madame Dorsey.

Mrs. Stuart was not long in introducing her nephew, young Morgan, who had taken the clerkship refused by Philip Stuart. When Thanksgiving day came, Josephine did not go home, though the distance was but a few miles, but spent the day with her new friends, Mr. Morgan making one of the family party. And when the holidays approached, Mrs. Stuart was beforehand with her invitation for the entire vacation. At first, Josephine thought she must go home, of course; but Mrs. Stuart represented the advantage it would be to her to remain in the city, and upon writing to her mother she received this characteristic reply:

"My dear Josie, by all means accept Mrs. Stuart's invitation; you say Lena's lives elegantly, and doubtless you will meet some very elegant people there. I hope, my dear child, that you are awake to the importance of making a good marriage. Your grandfather's legacy will be nearly, if not quite, spent upon your education. And it is necessary that you should look out that your future is provided for, by making a good marriage. And I have no doubt that my friend Mrs. Stuart will be of great assistance to you in introducing to you eligible young men."

As Josephine read this piece of foolishness, her cheeks flushed; and at the concluding sentences the poor girl dropped the letter, and, burying her face in her hands, shed bitter tears.

"To think that my mother would write such a letter!" she thought. Then she added, still mentally, "Poor mamma! I wish she had as much sense as I will not blame her. But it makes me ashamed to go to Mrs. Stuart's. What if anybody should see this letter?" and in horror at the thought she arose and laid the letter upon the coals, then sat down to write an acceptance to Mrs. Stuart's invitation. And if a deeper shade of pink than usual dyed her cheeks as she remembered that Mr. Morgan would probably be a frequent guest at his aunt's house during the holidays, it is to be wondered at, taking into consideration her mother's remarkable letter! She had by this time become quite well acquainted with Mr. Morgan. She knew he was not a rich man; she knew he was only a clerk, a clerk "in a downtown house." Mrs. Stuart had explained, and she had never thought to inquire closely as to his business; and if she had known the fact that he was connected with a liquor store, her ideas upon the temperance question were so vague and uninformed that I do not suppose she would have given the matter a second thought. She had been given to understand that to be connected with McGrawth & Co. was to be on the road to wealth; and Mrs. Stuart had spoken of Mr. Morgan as a young man bound to rise. He was very pleasing in his manners, and according to his own account of himself, as well as his aunt's recommendation, he was a very exemplary young man. He was fine a singer, a brilliant talker, and had all the accomplishments of a gentleman of society; and being very popular among the young ladies, it was not strange that a young girl like Josephine St. John, who had seen very little of the world, should be flattered by his evident admiration of herself.

She had known nothing of the circumstances of Philip Stuart's coming to the Centre, and never once connected any thought of him with the family of the same name with whom she was becoming so intimate.

She happened one evening some weeks after she was first introduced to the Stuart mansion, to be turning over a photograph album, when she came upon a familiar face.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "that is Mr. Stuart!"

Young Morgan was looking over with her, and he now said in surprise:

"That fellow! Do you know him?"

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