

COMPETITIVE WORKMEN.

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON.

CHAPTER VIII.

Breakfast was just over at the Flemings. It was likely to be a good hay day, and Mr. Fleming and "the boys," had hurried off to the meadows. At least, Bob was already there, with the horses and the new mower; while Fred and his father were grinding scythes in the tool-shed; Fred wishing that somebody would invent a machine that would cut the grass in the fence corners.

"Every kind of a machine that ever was made leaves some part of the work unfinished. Janet always has to fasten the threads when she sews on her machine, and when I went into the town the other day, I looked in at the knitting-mill, and there was a lot of girls 'finishing' the work that the machines had left unfinished. 'I'd like for once to see something turn out finished.'"

"Guess you'll find out that most things get finished up by other folks than them a-begins them," said John Blake, who had been hired for the day, as an 'extra,' and who was at that moment hunting for a string to supply the place of a missing suspender.

John Blake was seldom in a state of wholeness, as regarded his wardrobe. As Fred would say, "he put in for repairs pretty often." Now, as he adjusted the strap which he had found, he continued:

"I saw a bit of work being finished off last night as I was going home. Jones, down here in the hollow, does a neat piece of work, as far as he goes, but it takes old Christy to finish 'em up. He was just rolling Tim Burns out as I went home; I got him finished up fine, I done it up pretty quick, too. It don't seem but a lecture whiffence I and he used to suck cider through a straw down to Joneses, and there he was rolled out last night—rolled out drunk; and when I see that, I kinder thought I'd better follow the school-master's advice, and give Christy 'the go-ly.' But I dunno—there is a kind of attraction about a finishing-up room, and I s'pose I'll git there bimely." And with a reckless laugh, John Blake shouldered his fork and rake, took the cider-jug in one hand, and went off to turn out the grass cut down the day before in the lower lot.

Meantime Mrs. Fleming and Janet were busy with clearing away the morning meal. Mrs. Fleming brought in an armful of wood, for in haying the boys were quite too busy to think of such trifles as firing the wood-box. She put a stick in the stove "just to keep the fire up," and then turned her attention to the piles of dishes, which Janet had already deposited in the sink. Presently she spoke to Janet:

"See here! I'll wash these dishes while you go and pick the currants."

So Mrs. Fleming was not surprised at the alacrity with which Janet accepted this offer. The girl loved to get out of doors. She loved the old garden. She had spent many a happy hour down among the currant bushes. It was an old-fashioned garden, with a row of currant and gooseberry bushes all around, except for a space at the upper end, which was occupied by the asparagus bed, and just by the gate was the bunch of wormwood.

Janet went through the gate, shutting it behind her to keep the chickens out of the garden. She passed down between the rows of sweet corn, crossed the cucumber patch, and was soon stripping the large, juicy fruit from the heavily loaded branches. Suddenly she paused in her work, and putting down her pail, went back to the house, walking a little more slowly than when she came out. There was a perplexed look on her face.

Mrs. Fleming looked up in surprise as Janet entered the kitchen, and came over to the sink where her mother was lifting the plates from the steaming rinsing water, and placing them in a rack to drain.

"Mother," said Janet, "what are we going to do with the currants?"

"Do with them! Why, what we always do! Make them into jelly and wine."

For just a moment the mother and daughter stood still—the mother waiting, the daughter thinking. Then Janet said:

"Mother, suppose we don't make any wine this year?"

"Not make any wine! What is the child thinking of! When was there ever a year that we didn't make wine? Don't you know that we have bottles with the brand of every year since you were born! Why wouldn't we make any wine this year?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Janet, hesitatingly. "I s'pose you will. But I'd rather wash the dishes"—

Mrs. Fleming turned away from her dishes in alarm.

"Janet, are you sick? Go and lie right down, and I'll fix something hot just as quick as I can make the tea-kettle boil."

"O no, I'm not sick. But you know I belong to the Temperance Society."

"Mercy sakes, child! What has that to do with picking currants for a little home-made wine! You needn't drink it unless you want to; though, for that matter, I don't see how it could hurt you. Why, Janet, it is no worse to make and drink currant wine, than to make and drink cider."

"I don't suppose it is any worse. But our pledge says 'wine, beer and cider.' Don't you remember I told you what a fight they had over that clause, and how Mr. Stuart showed us that there is alcohol in cider?"

"Mr. Stuart, of course! I declare, Mr. Stuart has taken possession of you, soul and body! You have got so you don't breathe unless you do it according to Mr. Stuart's rules."

Janet's cheeks grew very red at this point.

Janet herself greatly admired her teacher. Now I do not mean that she had any silly fancies about him as a lover; he was to her a superior being, the impersonation of wonderful knowledge and wisdom. She loved and revered him as a wise teacher. Why, he was to her, years older than herself. He was away above her, and she was very grateful that he should reach a helping hand down to her. After her mother's sharp remarks upon Mr. Stuart's influence Janet was silent for a moment, then she said:

"Why, mother, I thought you liked Mr. Stuart?"

"Like him! I do like him well enough, but that's no reason why I should let him manage my private affairs. He does not know everything! I have lived longer than he has by twenty five years, and I haven't found out yet the harm in home-made wine."

"But, mother, if there is really alcohol in it?"

"Nonsense! How can there be any harm in just the pure juice of the currants and sugar! Next you will be objecting to jelly. You see, Janet, I don't believe in any such notions as these you have got into your head about there being alcohol in my wine. It is just as pure and clean as it can be, and you can't make me believe that it can hurt anybody."

"I can't explain it to you, but Mr. Stuart had a book that told all about the process of making alcohol, and proved to us that all fermented liquors have more or less of it in them."

"More or less! Well, you may take it the 'less' as far as our wine is concerned. Now, Janet, there is no use in talking; I tell you once for all, I am not going to believe any such stuff. And my currants are going into wine. You can pick them or let them alone, as you like."

It was only a moment Janet waited, then she said:

"Well, mother, it is your work; I'll do it because you say so, but I don't believe in it, and I am going to find out just why I don't. If Bob or Fred should ever grow to be fond of liquor, I should not like to remember that I picked the currants that my brother began with."

"Why, Janet! I should think you would be ashamed to hint such a thing of one of your brothers! The idea!"

The girl went slowly back through the garden to the place where she left her pail. The morning did not seem as bright to her as it did a half hour before. Very reluctantly she went to work again. Presently her mother came out to help. No further reference was made to the subject of their little talk, but after a while Mrs. Fleming said:

"Janet, you may as well get the dinner or, and I will keep at the picking. I will come in and help as soon as I fill up these pails."

And Janet, glad to be released, escaped to the house. How delightful the hot kitchen seemed to her. And all the rest of the morning she was studying the question, saying over and over to herself "I ought to have been able to tell exactly why I do not think it right to use home-made wines. There ought to be reasons that mother could not blow away with that one word,

"nonsense! And I'll find them out just as soon as ever I can."

Alas! the reasons which should convince Mrs. Fleming were to appear in a form as appalling as unexpected! Even now the shadow was hanging over them.

CHAPTER IX.

The promise of a good hay day was being fulfilled, and the men worked with a will. Bob drove "round and round" the great meadow, the circle growing gradually less and less, as swath after swath fell beneath the cutting-bar of the mower. Bob had not even stopped for luncheon, but he took frequent draughts from the jug, which, with the lunch-basket, had been deposited under the maple trees that bordered the field. Mr. Fleming had spoken warningly:

"Bob, I wouldn't drink too much cider; it is pretty sharp, and you have not been drinking it lately; it may affect you unpleasantly."

Bob only laughed as he started off on the next round. Once in passing the maples he called out to Fred, who was turning over the hay near by: "Just hand me that jug, will you?"

"Can't do it!" replied Fred. "And you'd better let it alone!"

"Can't! A fellow's got to drink something. I'm awful thirsty this morning. So if you won't wait on me I must help myself."

When the horn sounded for dinner, Bob drove round to the bars that led into the meadow and jumped from his seat. He had thrown the cutting-bar out of gear, and was stopping to await their coming. Dinner became late, and the men helped themselves to whatever they could find, for Janet and her mother were occupied with the still insensible boy. The doctor came as soon as he could be brought, and set the broken bones and dressed the gaping wounds. Bob having recovered consciousness was able to tell how it happened, so far as he knew. All that he could tell was that he was very dizzy, and must have lost his balance.

The doctor, in investigating the cause of his being so strangely affected, asked if he used tobacco.

"Not at all," was the reply.

"What had you for drink in the hay-field?"

"At this question the mother's heart grew suddenly chill.

"Mr. Fleming answered: 'We had only cider.'"

"Hard cider, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, pretty hard," was the reply.

"I think that will account for it," said the doctor. "I feared it might have been a slight sun-stroke, though the weather is not very hot. But I have no doubt it was the effect of the cider. Well, Mr. Fleming, you'll have to put another man on the mower for the rest of the season. I think the boy will pull through, though if fever should set in he might have a narrower chance than he has had to-day; and I shouldn't want to warrant another boy to come off with his life in a similar experiment."

Late in the afternoon, Mr. Fleming went down to see how the work was coming on. Standing under the trees for a moment, he saw the empty jug lying on the ground. Picking it up he dashed it against the nearest tree.

"There," he said, as he looked upon the broken pieces, "there is the last of cider in my hay-field! It has almost, and perhaps quite, cost my boy's life, and now we are done with it!"

Meantime Fred and Janet had discussed the matter on the back-door steps. Janet was sitting in the door-way, leaning her head wearily against the door-post, her hands lying

idly in her lap. Fred sat on the lower step, resting his elbow on his knee, and supporting his chin in his hand. His face was turned away from Janet, and he was looking off across the fields. Away beyond their own farm lots he saw the roof of the cider-mill over in the hollow, and as his eye fell upon it, he set his teeth hard and said aloud:

"It is just as Blake said this morning; that's where they begin, but poor Bob didn't have to go to Christy's for the finishing."

Janet did not quite catch the drift of this remark, but she said, her thoughts running in the same channel:

"But, Fred, do you suppose it can be possible that Bob was affected by the cider he drank? I didn't suppose that cider could be intoxicating."

"That is what the cider drinkers all say; but I know two or three things about it. One time last summer father sent me over to East Hill to work alone. I took a jug of cider with my dinner, and some way the more I drank the more thirsty I was; and along in the afternoon I felt so stupid that I lay down under some bushes and went to sleep. I did not think it was the cider, and when I went to work again I drank more; and I remember that I was so dizzy that I could not walk straight; all the way home I staggered like a drunken man; and now I think I was positively drunk!"

"Well," said Janet, with a sigh, "it is a new idea to me. I have opposed drinking cider, because I thought it led to a taste for stronger drinks; I never once supposed that there was really any danger, or indeed a possibility, of any one's drinking enough cider to produce intoxication. Mr. Stuart showed us that there was alcohol in cider and wine; and I have been afraid some-times that the little would give you boys a taste and desire for more. And do you suppose one could get drunk on mother's wine?"

"I am sure of it."

"I guess you are right about it," returned Janet, "but I don't suppose father and mother can ever be made to believe that the cider had anything to do with Bob's accident. I suppose that to-morrow morning we shall have to go to work at the wine. The currants are all ready. Mother intended to make it this afternoon."

But Janet was mistaken. Neither she nor Fred knew of the broken jug that lay under the tree down by the meadow, nor did they know of the sickening horror of the mother at the thought of the long row of cider-barrels or of the cases of wine bottles in the cellar. They did not know how that afternoon, in the silence of her own room, Mrs. Fleming had fought a battle. It was the battle of an awakened conscience and alarmed heart, with life-long beliefs and prejudices. They did not know of the prayers and confessions offered, nor of the vows registered. Mr. and Mrs. Fleming were of the few professing Christians in that neighborhood. There was scarcely a ray of hope that Bob could rally from the stupor into which he had fallen. Mr. Fleming, his wife, and a neighbor were watching beside the bed. At length, as they waited, there was a slight movement, and the eyes of the sick one opened. The doctor had left minute directions as to medicine and nourishment, in case he should rouse from his death-like sleep.

In that dark hour of struggle Mrs. Fleming had resolved to put away forever her favorite beliefs. But the idea of discarding them as medicine had not occurred to her, and she had one day remarked to the doctor:

"We have some old wine, if you should find stimulants necessary."

And the doctor had replied:

"Mrs. Fleming, I would not be answerable to my God, nor to you, for the consequence, were I to prescribe alcoholic stimulants for your son. I do not believe it to be necessary, and the risk is too great. In the early years of my practice, I prescribed alcoholic stimulants freely, and it came to my knowledge that I had sent at least one young man into a drunkard's grave. Since that hour I have never prescribed anything of the sort. If you have bottles of old wine, you will do better to pour them down the gutter than down that boy's throat."

Mrs. Fleming was at first inclined to be indignant; but there came a time when she saw more clearly, and thanked God that she had sent Dr. Richards to be their friend in need. And so a spoonful of wine or brandy was not the thing at hand to pour into the stomach of Bob Fleming when he roused from that stupor; nor at any time