

COMPETITIVE WORKMEN.

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON.

CHAPTER IV.

Helena St. John was dying. Of all Philip Stuart's pupils, Helena St. John was perhaps the most promising. She had always been fond of study, but this winter her mind had awakened to a new activity. The St. Johns were the nearest neighbors to the Wilsons. They had the poorest farm in the neighborhood, tilled in the most unskillful manner. Everything about their home evinced a lack of thrift. Mrs. St. John was the daughter of a wealthy farmer. She had been a pretty, romantic girl, and had for the romance of the thing married her father's farm-hand—a young fellow with no other recommendation than his good looks. The romance soon wore off, and the poor woman settled down into a very commonplace sort of life. She lost her prettiness and grew fat and blowy. Her husband lost his good looks, and became a thriftless, lazy, cider-drinking lounger. What sort of a home would two people of such a stamp make for their children? It was a tumble-down house, with broken shutters, dilapidated doorstep, and falling chimneys. To those who knew them, and who knew of the discomforts of the interior of that house, it was a marvel how those children managed to present so creditable an appearance at school. Flavius, the oldest, might appear in the shabbiest of coats and the most battered of hats, but he always showed a spotless collar and the whitest of cuffs. He was a very precise youth, and always said "can not," and "do not," where others would say "can't" and "don't." He had a sort of courtly grace which, backed by more money, would have given him the entrée to the best circles of society. Flavius, with the two next in order of age, Helena and Josephine, and their brother Claude, were among Mr. Stuart's pupils, and that gentleman often dropped in at an evening to encourage and help the young people in their lessons.

It was about the middle of the winter that Helena, always delicate, took a heavy cold, and for a few days was alarmingly ill; then she seemed to be recovering; but having rallied just so that their fears subsided, she seemed to get no further. And it was while they were thinking that she was gaining very slowly, but were not at all fearing anything more serious than a slow recovery, that Dr. Clarke, finding Mr. St. John in the yard one morning as he left the house, after visiting the patient, said:

"Mr. St. John, I am afraid that you are not prepared for what must come very soon."

In great surprise Mr. St. John asked:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that your daughter's days are numbered. That is now only a matter of a very few days, more or less."

The man fairly staggered under the unexpected blow.

"Do you mean to say,"—and his voice was unsteady, "that Helena is going to die?"

Dr. Clarke laid his hand soothingly upon the man's shoulder:

"My friend, Helena is dying. You must be strong; tell your wife and the rest of them, so that they may not be unprepared for what must come soon."

It was a fearful shock to them all. Even the mother's eye had not discerned the truth. When they had all had a little time to recover themselves, some one asked:

"Who will tell Helena?"

"Why need anybody tell her?" asked her father. "Just be cheerful, all of you, and she need not know. The doctor said she'd likely go off easy, and what's the use of her knowing?"

The St. Johns were not at all religious; they had never taught their children the need of a preparation for death; they had never taught them to pray. I do not know that they could be said to have any views. They held a sort of belief that awfully wicked people, as murderers and thieves, would be punished, but the people who didn't do anything very bad would be well enough off. And they could not see that it would be of any use to tell Helena that she was dying. But Josephine insisted that Helena ought to know. She said, almost indignantly:

"It is not right, if I were in her place I should want to know. She may want to say things to us."

At 1 then Josephine ran away to shed bitter tears, which she had restrained before

her parents. Just then Mr. Stuart, having heard from Dr. Clarke that Helena St. John was dying, made his appearance, and the stricken mother said:

"Oh, Mr. Stuart! Josie says she thinks Lena ought to be told. Do you think so? And will you tell her? None of us can."

And Philip Stuart, who had no personal Saviour himself, who did not know of the love that could light the dark valley, undertook to guide this soul on its way. He had no need to tell her she was dying. She had noticed the grave looks of Dr. Clarke, and, with the sharpened ear of sickness, she had heard enough to tell her the truth. And as her beloved teacher took her wasted hand in his own, she said:

"Mr. Stuart, I want you to tell me, do you think I have need to be afraid? I know that I am going to die, and I don't know what is beyond. But you are wiser; do you think there is anything to be afraid of?"

What should he say? He had by his life taught this child that Jesus Christ was a myth; that prayer was but the incense of a pure heart ascending in every holy wish and desire; that to be upright and moral was all the religion needed. He had taken occasion to present his views in a debate, not many weeks previous, and no doubt it was to this very exposition of his ideas that Helena's thoughts recurred as she asked the question. Strange that to him should come words of Scripture as best expressing what he would say to her. Strange that he should use the words of one whom he rejected.

"Helena," he said, "you remember, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Does not that satisfy you?"

A violent fit of coughing interrupted the conversation for that time, but later in the day Mr. Stuart was sent for. As he came to her side, Helena said:

"Mr. Stuart, you answered me in the words of the Bible this morning. Now I am sure that somewhere in the Bible are words like these: 'There is no other way whereby ye can be saved,' and I think it refers to Jesus Christ; and according to that a pure heart is not enough. Can you tell me how to settle the question?"

"Helena, my child, I cannot!"

"Oh, dear! Who will tell me? I never thought I would be afraid to die, but I am!"

Mr. Stuart's efforts to calm her were in vain. At last she said, suddenly:

"Isn't Fritz Hettinger a Christian?"

"I believe he is what they call a Christian," replied Philip, almost coldly. And so he was to be set aside in his office of comforter to the dying girl, for an ignorant boy.

"I wish you'd go and bring him here," said Helena; "perhaps he can tell me what I want to know."

Mr. Stuart was vexed at himself for what he called his momentary weakness. He said to himself that he had failed where he ought to have been strong. His regard for his pupil, and his grief at the prospect of losing her, had unwarred him, and forced from him that unfortunate "I cannot." He attempted to regain her confidence, but she insisted upon seeing Fritz, and Fritz was sent for.

CHAPTER V.

When, in response to Helena's request, Fritz Hettinger was admitted into the room where she sat, or rather lay in the great arm-chair, propped up with pillows, he was shocked at her changed appearance. He had seen her often since he came to live at the Wilsons'. In that country place the chore-boy was not considered, socially, so very far below the farmer's sons and daughters; and there was that about Fritz Hettinger which ought to have given him a place beside the grandest of the land. He was a true soul; pure in heart as he was pure in speech; his coat might be shabby, and his hair begrimed with toil, but his character was stainless. His opinions were clear upon all subjects which he had looked into, and he expressed himself in simple but well-put terms. He had never been called upon to pilot a dying soul through the dark waters, but he had studied the great chart so faithfully, and listened so willingly to the teachings of the Spirit of God, that he had no hesitation now, though he seemed to stand in the very presence of the Messenger that was calling the timid, trembling soul into the presence of the King of kings.

"Fritz," said Helena, "Mr. Stuart has taught me many things. He led me out into a new life of knowledge and beauty. But he cannot teach me what I want to know now,

what I must learn quickly. He says a pure and blameless life, such as he thinks I have lived, is all the preparation necessary that one may meet God in peace. I cannot rest on that assurance. I did at first. I thought he ought to know. He is so wise, and knows so many things. But thinking it over and over, as I have been here so still and alone, thoughts came to me which shake my trust. Tell me, Fritz, what your belief says about the future. It is all so dark!" This last sentence burst out with as sudden a wave of anguish.

"I am the light of the world," Fritz said, softly.

"But how shall I find it?" said the poor girl. "I see no light!"

"The spirit of truth will guide you into all truth!" And Fritz went on repeating precious promises and invitations from the word of God.

It was strange how few words of his own Fritz used in all that interview. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "He is able to save them to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." "He gave himself a ransom for all." "He will be very gracious unto them at the voice of thy cry. When he shall hear it he will answer thee." "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." "It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

"Does it say that?" asked Helena, eagerly.

"Yes," said Fritz, "it says that, and it says: 'The Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow and from thy fear.' You have only to rest upon him. There is no goodness or purity in us upon which we can depend about us as a cover for all that is unholiness in us; and he says, 'Blessed is he whose sin is covered.'"

At the end of the talk, Helena said:

"I think I see the truth, dimly, perhaps, but I can accept it. Fritz, will you pray now before you go?"

Without a moment's hesitation Fritz knelt down, and these were the words he used:

"Dear Saviour, wilt thou light up the dark valley for my friend? Thou art calling her to pass over from time into eternity. May she be able to say, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.'"

Dear Saviour, may she realize that it is spiritual blindness that shuts her away from the light. May she know certainly that there is light even in the hour of death. May she, like Bartimeus, cast away every hindering thing, and come to Jesus, that her eyes may be opened so that she may see the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. May she put away all hopes because of her pure life. May she not depend upon her own righteousness. May she come now and be made to see, Dear Jesus, she comes! I bring her on the wings of faith! Let the light into her soul now, dear Saviour, just now! and light up the path all along, until she stands before the throne, redeemed."

Rising from his knees, Fritz only waited to say:

"Seek him that turneth the shadow of death into the morning. The Lord is his name."

When Mr. Stuart came again, Helena thanked him for all he had done for her:

"You showed me a new world," she said, "I was asleep, intellectually, until you came and awakened me. Those three months of study under your teaching were worth more to me than all the years of school I had before. You helped to fit me for the higher enjoyment of heaven. But, oh! Mr. Stuart, you left out the most important part; you did not show me how to gain heaven. I have learned within the last two or three days that education with religion is everything—that without religion it is nothing. I do hope you will add to your grand education a knowledge of the Christian's faith. Mr. Stuart, it is beautiful; and beside it everything else is nothing! You may think now that you can depend upon your own goodness; but when you come to stand face to face with death, you will find your goodness and purity will not cover the evil that all at once springs up and threatens to overwhelm you. Oh, it was so dark until I came to Christ, and he opened my eyes to see the light, and now it is so bright!"

She lay back exhausted, and Mr. Stuart having no word to say in reply, slipped away, and came no more for several days.

Helena grew weaker, day after day. Until the last morning she sat pillowed in an easy chair and saw her friends. She would have it so, though she could talk but little. She said to the family: "It cannot make much difference to me. I shall not go much, if any sooner, if I do get tired; and I want to see whoever calls, until the last." So they came, and the sick room was the brightest in the house; yes I think it was the brightest room in the neighborhood.

Meantime, school went on as usual. The scholars were subdued and quiet. Mr. Stuart looked pale and wearied. He had no feeling of resentment; but in spite of his goodness he felt hurt at being set aside, in the office of teacher and comforter, for Fritz Hettinger. He called himself a fool, in that he had failed so miserably in being a help to Helena. To Flavius he said:

"I suppose it will do no real harm for her to indulge such a delusion. Yet I would rather that she should have died bravely holding on to the truth. It would have been such a blow to fanaticism to have seen one so young and so brilliant going down to the grave calm and fearless, carrying her own pure and unsullied character as a passport into the other world. Her trusting as she does in a myth, will not take away from her that which will be her real dependence—the unmarred purity of her beautiful soul."

Now Flavius St John might have listened to the coarse blasphemy of the most noted infidel lecturer of his generation without being impressed with his views, for everything coarse was repulsive to the boy; but this talk of sweetness and beauty, purity of soul and unsullied images, and unmarried lives captivated his fancy, and made him a willing listener to this teacher of the most pernicious theories. And thus while Fritz, the earnest-hearted Christian boy, was smoothing Helena's path, leading her into the light of perfect day, Philip Stuart, the unbeliever, was leading Flavius into a maze of error from which he should find no way out for long weary years. He had given the boy a lift, intellectually; as he had led Helena into new and untrodden paths of knowledge, so he had awakened the slumbering powers of her brother. Indeed, Philip Stuart had set in motion agencies which were to lift the whole family out of a wretched state of indolence and poverty. A great work, surely, yet it needed to be supplemented.

As Helena lingered from day to day, her growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ was marked. Mr. Fisher, learning through Fritz of her illness, came to visit her. Coming out from the sick room, he said:

"The Great Teacher has been with her. She has fathomed greater mysteries than many of us older Christians have reached. I count it a great privilege to have seen and talked with her. I have learned something in there."

Now had Mr. Fisher aimed at making Mr. St. John his friend, he could not have spoken better words. He was not capable of understanding them. What might be the mysteries of which the minister had spoken, or what he might have learned from the dying girl, he could not comprehend; but the words sounded to him like praise of Helena, of his daughter. He felt as if in some way an honor reflected upon himself and the rest of his family. Poor man, while he was truly almost heart-broken at the thought of losing Helena, he was in danger of growing proud. Never before had the family at the little tumble-down house received so many calls or so many kindnesses at the hands of their neighbors. There was no lack of comforts for the invalid, no lack of the tenderest nursing. Mr. St. John stayed more at home, lounging less at the hotel, and drinking less cider. Every morning before he went into Helena's room, he made an attempt at making himself look more respectable; he shaved oftener, and his hair began to show familiarity with a comb. He grew less crabbed and morose. The presence of sickness and death in the house was softening him, and one day, when he had spoken gently to Josephine, even tenderly, she said to herself, as he turned away:

"If father were always like that! I believe if he would let cider alone, he would be pleasanter. If Lena thought of it, maybe she could get him to promise; but it might trouble her if I spoke of it."

The St. John children had never known that there was a great difference in fathers or in homes. They had never been much, if any, away from home, and did not know