

COMPETITIVE WORKMEN.

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON.

CHAPTER III.

The next day, when they were alone, Ernest said:

"Fritz, I am going to learn to pray to your Jesus; and I shall ask him to make me well again. If he could stop that dreadful pain in my back last night, I am sure he could make me well, and I am going to ask him. Don't you believe he would?"

"I think he will if you ask him," answered Fritz.

"Why do you put such notions into that child's head?" said Mr. Stuart, coming in at that moment.

Fritz looked up in astonishment.

"What do you mean? Don't you believe that God hears our prayers?"

"Oh, I suppose he hears."

"And don't you think he answers?"

"Do you think so?" asked Mr. Stuart.

"I believe that what he has said he will do, he will do," was the reply.

"You saw yourself how quickly he heard last night."

"Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

These words came to Philip Stuart's mind like a flash, but he put them away, and replied:

"Oh, that is easily accounted for. Ernest is very nervous, and just so long as his mind dwelt upon himself he felt the pain, but just as soon as his thoughts were drawn away from himself he grew quiet and slept."

"I can't see that it would make it any the less an answer to prayer, even if that were the case," replied Fritz.

"Well, I can't see it as you do," said Philip; "the age of miracles is past."

"Well, so it is said. You don't expect to see the sun rise to-morrow morning, do you?"

"Why, yes, I do! What has that to do with the question?"

"Very little, I suppose; only it seemed to me that if it is a miracle for God to keep on doing what he has always been doing in the spiritual world, in the way of answering prayer, it might just as well be called a miracle when he keeps on doing what he has always done in the natural world; so if, as you say, the age of answering prayer is past, why, then, of course, you can't depend upon the sun."

Philip laughed.

"Quite a speech, Fritz, my boy; but I am not convinced even by your argument that God condescends to pay attention to such little things as the aches and pains of the body."

"Queer!" said Fritz.

"What?" asked Philip.

"Oh, I was thinking how strange that he should have taken pains to number the hairs of our heads while he does not think of our aches."

"Oh! but you know that about the hairs of our heads is a figure of speech."

"Well, what truth would it most aptly illustrate?" asked Fritz.

Philip Stuart evidently thought that there was no prospect of bringing Fritz over to his views—if he might be said to have any views on religious subjects—and looking at his watch, he concluded that it was nearly school time.

Fritz Hettinger had come from a neighborhood where the religious element was in the ascendancy. Sabbaths away from the house of God were unknown to him. To have no Sunday-School, and to go through the week without a prayer-meeting, seemed like a relapse into heathenism. During the first six weeks of his life at the Centre he had been quietly taking observations. He had learned that a few of the people attended church service at the village, but that there were many sabbaths in the year when storms and bad roads kept whole families at home. He learned that several attempts had been made to have a Sunday-school in the old church, but all had proved futile. These and many other astonishing facts had developed themselves.

One day Fritz was sent to the village to the mill. Having to wait for his grist, he determined to make a move in the line of carrying out the plan which he had been developing in his not over-quick brain.

The Rev. Oswald Grant was busy with his sermon for the following Sabbath, when a servant informed him that a young man wished to see him.

"A stranger?"

"Yes, sir. He did not send in a card, and I could not get hold of the name. A commonish sort of a person, sir."

"Well, I suppose I'll have to see him," was the somewhat impatient conclusion of the minister, and our friend Fritz was accordingly shown in.

Fritz's heart was all aglow with interest in his purpose, though little was expressed in his somewhat solid face. Perhaps if Mr. Oswald Grant could have looked into the heart of the young man, he might have been prompted to answer him differently.

Fritz began:

"I hope you'll excuse me for troubling you, sir, but I have lately come to live at the Centre, and I find things different from what I've been used to. We haven't much Sunday out there, sir."

"Ah! I have supposed so. Rather a hard neighborhood."

"Well, in some respects, yes. But it has seemed to me that we might have better things, and I thought I'd come in and ask you if you could come out and preach to us of a Sunday afternoon, and show us how to begin a Sunday-school."

Mr. Grant's face expressed astonishment. Here was a bold request, indeed! Now it never occurred to the simple-hearted Fritz that any Christian minister would not be glad to be told of some place where the people needed the Gospel; and he was sincere in his request, and he was sincere in his refusal.

"My dear young friend," said the minister, "I assure you nothing would give me greater pleasure if I thought there was the slightest chance of success. But I am told that the experiment has been tried before this. So you see it would be a sheer waste of time and strength."

Fritz's heart sank. Then he knew how much his heart was set upon bringing the truth to his friends at the Centre. Mr. Grant was courteous, but decided in his opinion that nothing could be done there.

"Do you mean," said Fritz, "that you think the people out there cannot be reached? They are my friends, and I cannot bear to have to think that they are beyond the reach of God's mercy."

"Oh, my dear young friend! you jump at conclusions. I only mean that as efforts in that direction have heretofore failed, it does not seem to me to be worth while to spend the time that might be more profitably employed elsewhere."

"Of course you know best," replied Fritz, sadly. "You see I thought that perhaps if some one would go out and give us a start, we might manage to keep up a little service by ourselves—just a prayer-meeting and Sunday-school."

He bade Mr. Grant good-morning, and walked away, in no wise convinced that it would be a useless undertaking. So gladly had this boy received the gospel, and so narrow had been his sphere of action and observation, that he could not conceive of a people who would not drink in the same precious truths if they were presented to them. He argued that the people who could be so easily induced to come together for a literary and temperance gathering would also come to hear so novel a thing as a sermon. And he was sure of the children. Fritz was always sure of the children. By what seemed a sort of magic he could always hold them. No, Fritz was not convinced, neither was he discouraged. He only began to consider anew as to means. Finding that he still had time on his hands, he walked down to the pond. It was Saturday, and the ice was gay with merry skaters. He stood looking at the pretty scene, when a voice at his side said:

"You and I seem to be only lookers-on."

Looking up, Fritz recognized the owner of the voice as another of the village pastors. He answered quickly:

"I haven't forgotten how to skate, but I haven't time to join them to-day."

"I came down to look after my little daughter," said the gentleman; "but I am afraid I have forgotten how to skate."

Then, looking sharply at the boy, he added:

"Excuse me—you live out in the country?"

"Yes, sir; I live over at the Centre."

"Ah! I know where that is. I rode out that way last summer. I am a comparative stranger here. I believe they have no religious service over there?" he questioned.

"No, sir!"

And now Fritz's heart took a sudden courage. Something in the voice or face of the gentleman encouraged him to say what was in his mind.

"I have been thinking that if we could get a little help out there, we might keep up a Sunday-School or a prayer-meeting. It would seem good to have a service in the old church."

"Yes, indeed! Then you have not even a Sunday-school?"

"No, sir; we have nothing. I have been told that both Sunday-schools and prayer-meetings have been tried, but soon died out; but it seems to me as if something might be done."

"Yes," said the stranger, slowly. "As I said, I am a comparative stranger here, and I do not know what difficulties there may be in the way. I can scarcely conceive of a place where it would not be worth while to try to sustain a Sunday-school. Let's see! Who here you who would act as superintendent?"

"I don't know, sir. That seems to be a difficulty. There are two or three Christian men in the neighborhood, that I don't know. Well, those who would be likely to be interested are men who never take any part in the debates of the Literary Society, and I thought they wouldn't feel like speaking in public."

The gentleman smiled.

"I see," he said, "you have studied up the matter pretty well, and studied your men, too. But are you not a Christian yourself?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, what is to hinder you from acting as leader in this matter?"

The look of utter amazement which Fritz turned upon his new friend was almost laughable.

"What's to hinder? Why, everything!"

"Well, think of it; and would you like to have me come out and speak to your people, and help you to get started, or have you other plans?"

"Oh, if you only would!"

"Very well; have a notice circulated, and I will be there one week from to-morrow afternoon, at three o'clock."

"Thank you!" And Fritz was turning to go when a sudden thought came to him, and he said: "The people with whom I live have a son who is an invalid. He is twelve years old; and he told me the other day that he had never seen a minister in his life, and had never heard any one pray. If you could manage to come up and see Ernest—"

"Indeed, I will manage it!"

And each went his way—Fritz thinking, "What a good man he is; how strange we should have met in this way!" The minister thinking, "There's good stuff in that young fellow. He looks young; but I shouldn't wonder if he would do to run a school out there. I must try to get time to go out this next week and look the ground over."

It had grown to be a common occurrence for Fritz to lift the invalid boy from his chair to the bed. Indeed, so often was he called upon for this service, and such a relief was it to the boy to be held firmly in the strong arms, that the weary mother often said she could not do without Fritz. That evening, as he was helping Ernest to bed, he said:

"I saw a minister over at the mill to-day, and he is coming out here to see about having a Sunday-school."

"Oh, won't that be nice! Do you know, Fritz, that I think I am getting better, and I think by summer I shall be able to go."

And it was true, to the great wonder and joy of them all, that Ernest had been better for a month past than at any time since his long illness. Since the day when he began to pray for recovery he had steadily improved, and he would say:

"I am sure to get well! I have asked the Lord to make me well, and he has promised you know. I never knew about the promises in the Bible until a little while ago, or I should have asked before."

This he said to Mr. Fisher, the minister, who called in the course of a few days after his interview with Fritz.

Under ordinary circumstances, Mrs. Wilson would not have been likely to welcome a minister very heartily, but when she saw the little look that came into the face of her darling, she was glad too. Mrs. Wilson had grown up with almost no religious training. She had been considered a well-

educated girl, and was an accomplished musician, and had kept up her practice somewhat, because it was sometimes the only thing that would quiet Ernest during his spasms of pain. She had never, even in her girlhood, been a regular church attendant, and since her marriage she had seldom been inside of a church. Mr. Fisher was quite unlike her preconceived notions of a minister.

"He was so friendly, and made himself so much at home, that I forgot to be nervous. I would not have supposed that I could have talked with him with so little embarrassment."

"I don't know why you should be afraid of a minister," said her husband.

"I don't know, either; but I was always taught to look upon ministers as very critical, and I grew to have a sort of fear of one. I supposed they talked religion all the time."

"And this one didn't talk religion?" said Mr. Wilson, laughing.

"Well, come to think of it, he did. No, he didn't! Well!"

"Seems to me you are rather mixed as to what he did do," said Mr. Wilson teasingly.

"All I know about him is that he is different from anybody I ever talked with. He never seems to forget that his business is to try to persuade people to be Christians, and yet he says very little about it. But for all, he don't let you get far away from the thought."

"Dear me! I should think it would be dreadfully uncomfortable to have that sort of feeling hanging over one."

"Oh, you don't know anything about what I mean! You just go and hear him preach. He is coming out to preach in the old church next Sunday afternoon."

"Whew! And so we are going to be a church-going neighborhood, in spite of ourselves?"

Then going into Ernest's room:

"How did my boy like the visitor?"

"Oh, I liked him. And father, I want you and mother to go and hear him preach. And do you know, he is going to begin a Sunday-school in the church, and next summer I shall be well enough to go!"

"My dear child, you must not think too much about being well, because you may soon be worse again; and the disappointment will be too great for you if you let yourself hope too much."

"But, papa, why won't you believe I am going to be well? You see I am so sure of it, because Jesus never turned away any one who came to him, and I have come!"

(To be Continued.)

"SUCH A POOR, MEAN THING!"

BY EMILY SARAH HOLY.

One of the most beautiful passages in Miss Holy's "Imogen" lingers in our hearts like a chord of sweet harmony. Few who read the touching story of Hroif will soon forget the simple beauty of the old Dane's words and deeds. We feel sure many of our readers will gladly welcome the reproduction of this incident in our pages.

The circumstances are these. Edric, a prince, was shipwrecked during a coasting voyage, captured by King Ethelfrid, a heathen, a persecutor, a fierce enemy of Christians. The prince was cast into a dungeon to await a cruel death. The king consented to set Edric free should any man—not a woman—a freeman, of blood equal to Edric, voluntarily give his life for the prince. Hroif, a Dane, an old man, an exile from Denmark, but a son of King Harald, comes forward, as thus told.

In a damp underground cell with an earthen floor, into which very little light penetrated, Edric, the son of Wulphers, Thane of Cantwara, was pacing restlessly up and down. He had just enough hope left to make him restless and unsubsmissive. If the news should reach King Ethelbert in time, his royal uncle might ransom him; and if he offered to do so, possibly Ethelfrid might not choose to risk offending the Bretwalda. Or if Brand should succeed in threading his way to Breich-y-Duinns (of which the said Brand did not know a mile between York and Chester), and if Imogen could obtain somebody's help—the individual was mythic—to enlist the sympathies of Queen Aeca, and if Queen Aeca had any influence over her present husband, Ethelfrid—then there was a chance in that quarter.

On this frail ladder of "Is" poor Edric