

COMPETITIVE WORKMEN.

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Meantime, how fared our friends elsewhere? At the Centre, Janet Fleming and Ernie Holmes were earnest in good works, in Sunday-school and church. Mr. Coles, the pastor, found them among his most efficient helpers. In the temperance work they were leaders. They realized that the victory which had been won did not ensure rest from further effort; they had no idea of giving the enemy a chance to gather up forces for a fresh onset.

"The sentiment of our town is strong for prohibition now," said Janet, "and we must not let it decrease; the way to do is to keep the subject before the people, and to educate the children so that they will grow up with right ideas upon the question."

And accordingly the children were invited to come together from week to week to listen to talks upon temperance. It was soon discovered that Janet had unusual talent in the direction of conducting these meetings, and talking to the children. The movement became popular, and not to be a member of the band was to be quite outside the circle of popular society.

"What can she find to talk about?" asked some one, of one of the children of the neighborhood. "I've heard a good many temperance lectures, but they were all about the same thing, right over. I don't see what a girl can get up that's new."

"Why, it's all new!" replied the child. "She tells us all about alcohol, how it is made, and what effect it has on the body, and how a little even does harm, and—oh, we are all just as strong for temperance!"

"Little danger that the coming generation of voters in Milford will vote for a renewal of the traffic in their midst!"

Janet Fleming had not forgotten Philip Stuart. How could she forget the one who had opened for her the door that led into the wide field of knowledge! He had roused her slumbering intellect and had given her a taste for intellectual pleasures; and thirsting for more she had continued to drink, taking in deeper and fuller draughts, until now she stood in her beautiful womanhood with a cultured mind, possessing a command of language in which to clothe her thoughts, a readiness of illustration, and a flow of fancy and imagery which made her a pleasing and helpful teacher; and in the enjoyment of her powers, remembering who had helped her forward, could she ever think of Mr. Stuart otherwise than in loving remembrance? Alas, that the memory of her friend should be so full of pain! There was one battle she had fought over and over in her soul. When Philip Stuart took her answer that summer evening as they walked home together for the last time, when she so resolutely put aside the love that would have been to her a shade of joy, the conflict had but just begun. Not that she ever regretted her decision—but her weak woman's heart cried out for the lost happiness; her reason, her better judgment, her conscience, her Christian womanhood all told her that she was right in her course; still the old love would sometimes assert itself and refuse to be set aside. When she thought the conflict was ended and that she had settled the longing of her heart forever, when she fancied that the love was dead, some chance word, some well-remembered look, or walk, or perhaps only a flower, or line of a poem, would bring a rush of memories, and again she would realize only too painfully that it was not yet a dead and hidden love, and then the battle must be all fought over again. But so deep was all this buried in Janet's heart that no one suspected the truth. Those who watched her development and wondered at it, knew not whereof was born the beauty and power and dignity of character that seemed to place her above other young ladies. Ernie Holmes, herself growing in womanly graces and finding new beauty in books and pictures, could not keep pace with Janet, and was learning to look upon her as above common mortals. If she ever suspected the truth she never hinted it to Janet. Mr. Stuart seemed to have dropped out of their lives; they never heard from him directly. Now and then an item in a newspaper or a stray rumor, told of his prosperity and rising fortunes. That was all. It was but natural that his name should often be heard in a neighborhood where he had done such good work, helping forward so many commendable enterprises, and it was always spoken with re-

spect, but afterwards Ernie remembered that Janet never of her own accord spoke of Philip Stuart.

Between Ernie and Janet's brother Fred there had existed from childhood a boy and girl friendship; it was Ernie Holmes who rode off most on Fred Fleming's sled, Ernie who received the prettiest valentines and the first bunch of spring flowers; and as they grew older no one was surprised when a marriage engagement was announced. Then there were plans for a new house under discussion. Mr. Holmes insisted that there was plenty of room in the great house for them all; but Fred as strenuously insisted upon a home of their own; and Mr. Holmes yielded and entered earnestly into the planning of the young people, being exceedingly liberal both with money and advice.

However, Mr. Holmes had one rare quality. Having bestowed his gifts, whether of the one commodity mentioned or the other, he left it to the discretion of the recipients as to the disposal of said gifts. The new house was built, and Robert came home from delivering his graduation speech to attend the wedding. There was just one bit of friction unknown to the world outside. I have already mentioned that Mr. Holmes lived in the largest and handsomest house in the neighborhood, probably the finest in the township, perhaps in the county. Naturally he was somewhat proud and fond of entertaining friends. They entertained generously at all times, and now that the only daughter of the family was to be married, there was to be an unusual display. And it was in discussing the arrangements that the slight difference of opinion between Ernie and her father arose.

"No wine at the wedding!"

Mr. Holmes' tone and look were more expressive than his words.

"No wine at the wedding! Who ever heard of such a thing as a wedding pretending to be got up in any style without wine?"

"I have attended several weddings where there was no wine," said Ernie.

"O yes! Such people as the Browns and Smiths; of course they would not be expected to have it."

"There was no wine served at Judge Baker's, at Louise's wedding."

"Judge Baker is a fanatic! Now, I am a temperance man, as you know. I have always helped you and Janet along in your work with the children, and you know too how hard I worked at the polls for no license; but I can't see the sense of having no wine at your wedding. Why, Ernie, it will look stingy."

Ernie laughed at this argument. "Why, father, I guess you will be able to spend money enough before you get through with it all, to satisfy people that you are not stingy. I'll put a dozen more yards of lace on my dress, and that will count up somewhere near the price of the wine. If not, I'll get more expensive lace!"

Mr. Holmes smiled; his darling might buy as expensive lace as she pleased, and she was sure, too, to have her way in this other thing; only it did seem so foolish and absurd to him.

"That young school-teacher was a capital fellow," he said, "and helped things along wonderfully here; but, like all the rest of his class, he went to extremes. Now, I'd like to know what possible objection there can be to having wine at your wedding? Wine seems to belong to a wedding as much as white satin and orange flowers; and I can't see why you should be so opposed to it."

"So as to be consistent, father," said Ernie. "The position which I hold in Sunday-school and in the temperance band makes it expedient that I should be very careful how I act. And, besides, I do not want to be the one who gives my brother his first glass."

Mr. Holmes was silent. He remembered other boys, and he remembered, too, a time when he had been exceedingly anxious about this boy of his, and he had always believed that it was Mr. Stuart who saved his Jack; and it was from Mr. Stuart that Ernie had learned her notions. Ernie continued:

"And, besides, among those who will be our guests, there are two or three at least to whom I should not dare offer wine, for fear they would be led back to their old habits of drinking."

"But, Ernie, if you undertake to watch over all the reformed drunkards, you will have more than you can attend to. A glass of wine is an innocent thing, and every one must stand or fall for himself."

"Oh, I don't propose to watch over them all, but I might take charge of a few," said Ernie, laughing a little, then adding soberly, "but, father, I don't quite agree to that standing or falling for one's self. You know it says we ought to support the weak, and to bear one another's burdens, and if meat maketh our brother to offend we ought to eat no meat, and a great deal more in the same direction. No, father, I think we will have no wine at the wedding. I don't want to be responsible for Jack Holmes, nor for old Peter Sleight, who will come in for his share of the feast."

And Mr. Holmes yielded the point reluctantly. You would not call Mr. Holmes a sentimental man, but he had some sentimental ideas about weddings, as associated with white dresses, wine, and other traditional customs; and had all his ideas been carried out, Ernie's wedding would have been a strange mingling of the old and the modern styles.

Among the guests was a brother of Mr. Wilson. For nearly a year he had been staying at the Wilson's, having become, from a few years experience of city life, almost ruined in health, and character as well. His brother had prevailed upon him to come out into the country for a few months, hoping that, away from temptation, he might be able to overcome the habits that had caused his ruin. And during those months he had been gaining in strength of body and mind. Not once had he touched a glass of liquor. Indeed, where would he get it? Sometimes he spoke of getting back to work, but always with a shudder. "I cannot trust myself yet!" he would say. And so he stayed on, struggling to put away the burning thirst for alcohol which would sometimes come upon him with power.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were speaking of the wedding; Mrs. Wilson said:

"I am almost afraid of this gathering."

"Afraid! What do you mean?"

"Only, if they should have wine!"

"Wine! wine at Ernie's wedding! Not a bit of it," said Mr. Wilson. "Don't you know her better than to suppose that?"

"Oh, I know Ernie would not approve, but Mr. Holmes will want to have everything on the most elegant scale, and as dignified as possible."

You see, Mrs. Wilson knew Mr. Holmes too.

"Very likely he will," returned her husband, "but Ernie will have a word to say about that matter. And you will see; there will be no wine!"

Albert Wilson had thought of the same thing, and he afterwards confessed that he would have stayed at home from dread of the temptation which might assail him, if he could have framed an excuse; and as the hour for serving refreshments drew near, he actually trembled with apprehension of danger; and when he found that no liquors were to be served, there was such a great reaction that great drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead; and months afterwards, when he had grown stronger and learned where to look for strength, he said:

"I had never in my life been to a large party where wine or other liquors were not served, and I had scarcely deemed it possible that temptation would not meet me there; and if it had I should have been a lost man, and a drunkard's curse would have followed Ernie Fleming the rest of her life! But she saved me. For the first time in my life I believed that God cared for me. That night was the turning point, and I owe the strength and vigor and renewed hope I enjoy to-day to the firmness of Ernie Holmes!"

CHAPTER XIX.

There came into the western town where Philip Stuart had established himself, a stranger. He had been invited by the president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union to deliver a course of lectures. These proved to be something more than temperance lectures; they were sermons, and they reached the hearts of the people as well as the intellects. Evening after evening, for weeks together, the people came in crowds to listen to the words of the eloquent teacher, and hundreds sought and found the way of life. At first Mr. Stuart, as full of zeal as he had been a few years before at the Centre, entered into the work with enthusiasm. He was as eager as ever to lift up the fallen, but he knew not himself of any other strength than man's, and could not direct fallen humanity to a stronghold. And when the work began to take on more and more a religious aspect, when the res-

cueed began to look to the Lord for help to keep their resolutions, when a genuine revival of religion grew out of the lectures, Philip Stuart could no longer follow the leader; he had gone beyond his depth. He began to stay away from the meetings; then he dropped in to see how things were progressing, and went away with a sneer on his handsome face. He said:

"Such a pity! The work was becoming very remarkable as a temperance movement, but the gatherings are degenerating into revival meetings!"

However, in spite of his scorn and determination to stand aloof, he went again and again. He was always a good listener; indeed, he had that rare quality of knowing how to listen always, to everybody, and I am not sure that this was not half the secret of his popularity. He would listen to his landlady's complaints of the inefficiency of her servants, and the impertinence of the grocer's boy, or the dishonesty of the lawyer, with the same complacency and air of interest with which he would attend to the exegesis of a brother professor; or he would give attention to the droppings of the old apple woman at the corner as patiently and sympathetically as to the entertaining talk of some friend just returned from a foreign tour. And thus with his accustomed manner he listened to the plain truths of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as set forth by one of his faithful servants. Now and then some one of his favorite beliefs or articles would be attacked, and, as he was sometimes forced to confess, utterly demolished. Though he would as often set at work to restore from the heap of ruins something like his old place of rest, it would not be just the same. After being thus reconstructed it would be but a tottering structure at best, some of his foundation stones gone beyond re-laying. And still some power which was irresistible drew him evening after evening to hear the old truths of the Bible reiterated. As of old, he would have scorned being led by the Spirit of God, yet it could have been none else. He grew more and more dissatisfied with his position upon religious questions. And the inquiry which Janet Fleming had put to him upon that last evening they spent together, came to him with startling force. She had asked:

"Is it an impossibility for you to be mistaken?" And now he began to wonder if, after all, he might not have blundered! He did what he ought to have had sense enough to have done long before, he began the study of the Bible. Does it not seem a strange thing that so many of those who deny the truths of the Bible should be so ignorant concerning it! The rankest infidel must acknowledge that it is a remarkable book, since it has such an influence, controlling the lives of millions! One would imagine that the spirit of investigation would lead a man to at least examine to find out wherein lies the wonderful strength of the book. With all his education and literary culture, Philip Stuart was woefully ignorant concerning the book of books. And as he was led to look into its truths he began to wonder at its beauty—a wonderful light seemed to illumine its pages as he read.

"Why! I never saw this so before!" he would say to himself; "can it be that these things are so?"

At length he went one evening to an inquiry meeting, and during the service he arose and said:

"I do not know that I can say that I desire to become a Christian; but I do desire to know the truth concerning him whom you call the Lord Jesus Christ. I have reached the point where I am willing to be taught, and have come into this inquiry meeting for that purpose. I find Christ the central figure in the New Testament, and the central thought of all the preaching and teaching I have heard in these meetings. I have been studying his life of late, and find it very wonderful; but my view of him and that of those whom I hear speaking of him as their friend seems to be different. I should like to know him as you know him."

The leader of the meeting smiled at the inconsistency of Mr. Stuart's first and his closing remarks, as he responded:

"As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. My brother, I shall be glad if I can clear away any of your difficulties. But the Holy Spirit is your best teacher, and I believe that He is leading you. May He bring you speedily into a close relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ."