

THE BRIDGE BETWEEN.

CHAPTER XLII.—SALLY SETTLES THE QUESTION.

"Dorothy," Mrs. Woodward said, one day, "your father and I have been talking about you. We don't think you are treating Mr. Fuller quite rightly. He is evidently very fond of you; and you have let him shilly-shally about the place for years."

"But what can I do, dear mamma?" she asked. "I can't remark that I don't care about him, and don't mean to marry him. Besides, it is not for my sake that he hangs about the place, but because he is fond of us all," and Dorothy tried to think that she was speaking the truth.

"That is all nonsense," Mrs. Woodward answered; "besides he told you father that he was very fond of you, and it is spoiling his career in life keeping him in uncertainty."

"But he need not be in any uncertainty, mamma. We should never suit each other, and he will never do any good work in the world."

"But you might spur him on to do some if you married him, and make a clever man of him; it is certainly in him to be one."

"If I could do this," thought Dorothy, that evening, "it would be a great and distinct work to offer to God, and with which to ennoble my life;" but her thoughts flew to the far-off land in which he who must be her life's hero still toiled; and the tears rushed into her eyes, and the old pain, years old now, it seemed to her, came into her heart—"If he had only cared for me as I did for him in the end!"

"I think Fuller is an awfully unlucky beggar," Tom observed that evening. "He never seems able to stir himself up, and he does nothing but hang about. I wonder he doesn't try to do something. He's very clever, you know."

"Tom, do you think he would do better if he had some one he cared about to spur him on?" she asked, hesitatingly. She had learnt to believe in the wisdom of her sturdy brother, and to ask his advice in many things. He thought for a minute.

"No," he answered; "it would only arouse him for a little while. Laziness is only selfishness, and it smothers up an awful lot of better feelings when it has been allowed to grow so long in triumph."

"How do you know, Tom?"

"Noticed it in the beggars at the office, and lots of other people." Then he was silent, for he began to think of how his selfishness had taken another and more distinct form in bygone days; and Dorothy, too, began to think of those same days, and of the long idle hours spent in the garden in vague dreams no future could realize.

"And that too was selfishness," she thought. "And it was a dozen other things that were wrong as well."

"What a dreadful thing laziness is, Tom!" she said at last; "and yet at first sight it does not seem a very great fault. It is like the weed which looks rather pretty at the beginning, but gradually chokes up the river."

"Yes," replied Tom; but he thought of the advance that had been promised him that day, and the praise he had received from his employers; and thought too that there still were greater faults than laziness, and that for all his prosperity he had to thank the girl before him, whom he felt proud and thankful to call his sister.

"Doll, do you remember long ago how we used to loiter about in the garden, and tell stories, and have games?" he said, musingly, after a minute; "and then you stirred yourself up and worked—what made you do it? I remember I used to spend all my money on myself till you shamed me

out of it." She could hardly keep back her tears as she answered him.

"It was Mr. Blakesley, Tom;" and she told him of the conversation they had had on an evening long since, and how, for her part and work in the world's great workshop she had tried to make the lives of those around her a little more beautiful. "I have only tried to do so, Tom, dear," she added; "I dare not even hope that I have really succeeded."

"You have made mine a little less ugly, at any rate," and then they were silent, and watched the twilight steal over the dear old garden, as they had watched it hundreds of times before. At last Tom spoke again. "Why didn't you tell me about this before, Doll? it's a grand idea, you know, and every one who hears it must long to try his hand."

"But there are other reasons too, Tom, besides its being a grand idea, why we should try to make our lives better," she said, softly, thinking of Tortoiseshell's dying words. Then Sally came down the pathway.

"Dorothy," she said, "I have been thinking of a new design for Christmas cards; some with texts intertwined, and some with bits of poetry."

"And what is your favourite quotation, Sally?" her sister asked, almost mechanically. The grave child looked up into her sister's face, and answered, "Ye may not do evil that good shall come."

She sat pondering over the words after Sally and Tom and Will had gone in-doors and left her alone above Venus's grave. "No, it would not do," she thought; "and I should only be doing a great wrong to Mr. Fuller and to myself." He came out to her a little later. They had told him where to find her, and he came and sat down on the rickety seat on which they had sat so often. She turned and looked at him—at his clear-cut features and the broad graceful shoulders—and thought of the days, those first days of that glorious summer after his return to England before he had ever made love to Netta. "They were very happy days," she thought. "I shall always think kindly of him, and have a grateful feeling for him, because he has given me so pleasant a memory, but I could never be in love with him again; he does not seem great enough to love."

"Well, Dorothy, what are you thinking of?" he asked, at last.

"I was thinking," she answered, "that we ought to teach ourselves only to consider things beautiful according to their goodness and greatness."

"What a queer child you are, always thinking of these odd things," he said, impatiently. "I came out here to ask you something. I shall never ask you again, Dorothy," he added, coldly, almost sadly.

"Ask me what?"

"Shall I keep this, or throw it away?" and he opened his pocket-book, and between two folds of silver paper showed her a faded yellow rose. She looked at it for a moment, while her thoughts went back to the day on which she had given it to him.

"Don't throw it away," she pleaded. "Our lives must divide here," she went on, firmly; "there is the world before you, and a career you must not lose—but our lives divide, for you must not spend so much time here; you are wasting your best days, you are indeed, but keep the rose still, Adrian. Because the winter is cold it is no reason we should forget the summer."

"And we can never be more to each other?" he said, in a low voice.

"Never," she answered, gently; "it is too late." The words were said before she knew it. He bowed his head down in his hands for a moment.

"Very well, Dorothy," he said, sadly,

and put the rose tenderly back into its old place.

After that evening Adrian Fuller seldom came to Hampstead.

CHAPTER XLIII.—THE BRIDGE BETWEEN.

It was late in the summer, and the evenings were getting chill and cold. "A long summer," sighed Dorothy, as she went over to Miss Blakesley's one evening. "I think we out to measure our age by our feelings rather than our years, and then I should have grown so old this year." Yet in spite of the sigh with which the words were said there was contentment in her heart, although, like all her feelings, it had a tinge of sadness, a strange tranquil satisfaction, gained by the knowledge that she was neither useless nor passive in the world, but that her hands and head and heart found work to do and thoughts to occupy them, and that at any rate that most precious thing, the time entrusted to her, was not wasted.

"My dear, I have a letter for you from George," Miss Blakesley said, when she appeared. "He is coming home immediately, almost as soon as his letter, he says." She hardly knew how she took it, or walked home that evening. She did not dare open it till she was safely locked in her own room, and then at last she read the few words it contained. "My dear Dorothy"—she was so thankful to see those first three words; she had been so afraid that he would call her "Miss Woodward." She could hardly read the rest of the short note at first, though it was merely to the effect that he was coming back immediately, and had been at the point of returning for months, or he would have answered her inquiries sooner, and that now he would do so in person, and he hoped it would be very soon.

Then she waited. She felt now that it was all right, that the old coldness had been swept away, and that he was coming back, not merely to England, but to her. "I won't meet him under the sycamore-tree," she thought; "I should like to be in the sitting-room when he comes, where he first told me that he cared for me." Then sometimes a doubt would creep into her heart, if after all he were only coming home to be on the merely friendly footing. "Oh, it would be dreadful," she said to herself one evening—for she had given up all hope of seeing him that day—as she stole out of the garden gate and on to the fields beyond—the fields she had walked across the first night on which she had been engaged to George Blakesley, long ago, and had thought her fate so hard. There were the same dim shadowy trees, the same long dewy grass. It brought it all back to her memory: and the tears came into her eyes. "I did not care for him then," she said; "and oh, if when he comes back he does not care"—she stopped, for she heard a footstep behind her, and turning round, she saw, only a few yards from her, the face there was no mistaking. She did not move an inch forward, only stood half hesitating, half trembling, till he came nearer, then she put out her hands. He looked at her for a moment, into her face, and her clear truthful eyes flashing with a light he had never seen there before; then, putting aside her outstretched hands, he drew her to his heart.

"My dear little girl," he said, presently, "to think I have you at last. There is no mistake this time, is there, Dorothy?"

She raised her head for a moment, and answered, with a long sigh of happiness, "Oh no, none at all."

"And when did you learn to love me, Dorothy?" he asked, at last.