

## Choice Literature.

## The Bridge Between.

CHAPTER XXIII.—AFTER THEY HAD LEFT HAMPSHIRE.

"Doll, whatever shall we do? The dad wants change of air, and better living, and lots of good things."

"He must have it too," she answered. "Let us all gather round and hold a council of war." Then Tom and Will and Sally clustered close to her. They were still in the shabby lodgings Dorothy had found for him six months before, and things had gone their very worst with Mr. Woodward; and, lastly, his health had failed, and a long illness had kept him in his bed nearly all the winter. Then it was that the children showed that, indolent and lazy and fun-loving as they had been in the old days, they could work when the time came.

Tom had retrieved his position and paid his debts, and shown such a disposition to work, that his former shortcomings had been overlooked; and careful and generous, he regularly brought his money to his sister. Will had got into an office, but had no salary as yet, though he hoped soon to gain one; and Sally had earned a little money once, for the grotesque figures she had loved to draw had proved useful as designs for Christmas cards, and now she was studying hard to improve herself in the art she loved so that she might gain constant employment. But it was Dorothy who had been the mainstay of the family when the day of sorrow came. She put away her story-books and poetry-books, and forgot her dreams, and left off building castles, and worked in earnest, teaching Mrs. Gilson's children in the morning, and writing from Miss Josephine's dictation in the afternoon, and sometimes till late in the evening, until her hand ached and the lines danced before her eyes. She had thought it would be so difficult to go and see the three old ladies, to ask for work. But she found it less so than she had imagined, for kind thoughtful George Blakesley had made all things smooth before her, and she had been received kindly for his sake; and as the months went on they learnt to like the girl who tried so hard to work and to win bread for her sick father and broken-down mother.

Dorothy's labours did not end with the putting away of Miss Josephine's pens and paper, for of an evening she had to read the paper to her father, and to sit by his side and cheer him up as best she could. Sometimes, too, she used to play to him, for George Blakesley bought in the piano and sent it as a present to Sally, but at last he got too ill to listen to her.

"The doctor says he must have a complete change," repeated Tom.

"He and mamma must go somewhere, and we must give up these rooms and take just two little bed-rooms, one for you and Will, and one for me and Sally, and we'll live upon as little as we can." And she stopped to consider how that plan would work, while Sally and Will nestled up closer to her, and Tom looked at her with all his old boyish admiration.

"I don't know what we should have done without you, Dolly," he said; "I was an awfully selfish fellow till you stirred me up by your example." Tom was always frank, and never ashamed to own his faults. "I don't wonder Blakesley was so spoungy on you."

"But he liked me before I ever tried to work," she answered; "he doesn't care for me now; and her face flushed as she spoke of him, and hid for the moment the careworn expression which had lately crept over it.

"I think he cares for us all now as much as he does for you," said Sally, looking up and kissing her sister's cheek; and the innocent words had a sting in them the child never dreamt.

"I don't see where we can send papa," she said; "it is so difficult to move him, and we have so little money; I think we had better consult Mr. Blakesley." And when he came that evening (he had returned a week before) they called him into the sitting-room (for he was going straight up to Mr. Woodward), and asked him how he thought it could be managed. They all had faith in George Blakesley.

"I think you had better wait a bit," he said, "and let him get stronger before you try to move him. By the way, a friend of mine has bought the lease of the old house at Hampstead, but he is not going to live in it just yet."

"I hate him!" said Tom.

"Why, pray?"

"Because we all must hate any one who lives in our dear old house," said Dorothy, the tears rushing to her eyes.

"Now, I have some more news for you, Dorothy. Your friend, Mr. Fuller, has returned, and called on me to ask your address. He is coming to see you." The children brightened up at the news, but Dorothy turned away and looked quietly out of the window. George Blakesley followed her up. "I thought you would be pleased to see your old friend again," he said; "and he was quite anxious to hear all about you."

"Yes!" she said.

"You won't see me so often when he comes, for I am going to get a friend to live with me, and I have a great deal of work also, and have little time."

"I see," she answered; and she thought, "He does not care to come now. He only does it out of kindness."

"You are not looking well lately, Dorothy. What is the matter?"

"Nothing much," she answered, "only papa's being ill worries me of course. Mr. Blakesley, is there anything else, excepting work and helping others, for which we may live—any happiness we may distinctly try to gain? Do you know," she went on, looking up into his face, "I get so tired sometimes, and feel as if I want some grand mental rest and sunshine."

"Talk to Aunt Milly, Dorothy; she will tell you better than I can." And he turned away coldly, and went up stairs.

"Ah," thought Dorothy, bitterly, "once, when I did not value it, I had his love, but now that I would give my life for it, he does not care for me a bit!" And so it was in the long winter months, when sorrow came to her and she had no one else on whom to lean, Dorothy had learnt to

see and to recognize all the nobleness in George Blakesley's character, to see and feel how kind and thoughtful and loving he could be, and to give him that thorough respect which is the foundation of all thorough love. He was no dreamer, who lived in long dreams of which he made himself the hero, no staggard, pining for ease, and without ambition save to earn enough to maintain himself, content to die without leaving the world one whit better for his life having been in it. No selfish weak man was George Blakesley, but a noble, upright, God-fearing one, whom to know thoroughly, and to love as Dorothy in those her days of sorrow and striving was learning to love him, was in itself an incentive to well-doing. And this is in a measure a test of all our characters, the effect which we have on those who love us; for as we are, so, in a measure, we make those who lean upon us; and a woman who cares for a man greater and better than herself cannot love vainly, for even if she does gain his love in return, yet in the mere effort to become worthy of him, she loses a part of her old self in his nobler nature, and turns away from all baser lower ones to struggle towards the height he has gained.

It seemed to Dorothy as if all George Blakesley's love for her went with his engagement to her. At any rate he had shown no sign of it since, and he had often almost pointedly spoken of Adrian Fuller, till she wondered if he knew or guessed of her old fancy for him. His manner piqued her sometimes. He could not have had a very strong regard for her, she thought, if he could so soon forget the old footing and be content with the new. "When I did not want his love, and did nothing to deserve it, I had it," she said to herself that evening. "And now that I have at any rate tried to be more worthy of it, it is out of my reach."

"My dear," said Miss Milly, the next day, "Josephine is not well enough to write to-day. She is ill and feverish, and obliged to keep to her room. Sit down and talk to me a little while, will you. I am all alone." Dorothy was fonder of her than of either of her sisters, and sat contentedly down at her feet. "Would you mind telling about yourself and George, Dorothy?" she asked; "I never liked to ask you, but I have so often wondered why it was broken off!"

Then, without any reserve, Dorothy told her the entire story. "Strange," said the old lady, when it was finished, "that he should have got over it so completely as he seems to have done. He told me this morning that you had an old friend returned from abroad, and that he thought you and he liked each other."

"Oh no, Miss Milly!" Yet the crimson color in her face deceived the old lady. "I think you are right, George," she told her nephew next time he came, "Dorothy is in love with the artist." He made no answer, but his visits to his old friends ceased almost altogether as soon as Mr. Woodward was sufficiently recovered to be down stairs again.

Miss Josephine was very ill—obliged to keep her bed for days, and unable to see any one. At last, when she partly recovered, she sent for Dorothy.

"I should like you to read to me," she said; and from that day, instead of writing, Dorothy sat by her side every afternoon, and read aloud.

"My dear Dorothy," she said, one evening, "I have often heard about you from my nephew, but I don't know much about your religious opinions; I should like to hear what they are."

"Oh, Miss Josephine," she answered, "I could not really explain them."

"Is religion a comfort to you? for that is what it should be."

"I don't know, Miss Josephine. I don't think I trouble very much about it, to tell the truth."

"But you should, my dear. I fancy you want a secret friend, some one to go to for counsel and help, and sympathy and love; this has often struck me. Go to your Saviour and your Bible, dear; there is no friend like Him, no comforter like His Word; all others may fail, but these never. Don't let your religion or your love for your God be a task or a more matter of duty; make it the thing nearest and dearest to your heart, until it becomes your staff and support and strength in everything and through anything. There is no happiness like this, my dear. It takes the bitterness from every sorrow, and gives you hope no mortal has power to dim or deprive you of, and it gives you not merely something to live for but to die for. I don't think I shall get well again, Dorothy; my strength seems failing daily, and I wanted to say this to you. Now kiss me, dear." And for the first time Dorothy kissed Miss Josephine's handsome face.

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They had not been many months in the shabby rooms before Dorothy received a characteristic letter from Netta in answer to the one she had written telling her of the family misfortunes. "The Beauty was vexed."

"I am very sorry for you all," she wrote; "but it is of no use telling me these things. It only makes me unhappy, and I did not at all like my husband knowing that my people were obliged to go into lodgings, and my sister to teach the children of an obscure doctor. Now, I have a good bit of news for you: Robert (Robert was the elder brother, who was stationed within a few miles of the Beauty) seemed quite touched with the account of the family troubles, and is going to write by this mail, making over the interest of the thousand pounds left him by grandpapa to you until better days shall dawn. This is very generous of him, though of course he is well off, and can afford it. I wish I could have done the same, but have too many things to buy, for in this place one is obliged to dress so much, and my husband is so absurd, and never understands this. I hope you will get one, and soon get into a house again. We must be in England again next year, for this climate does not agree with me at all. I wish you were here, Dorothy; you would soon get off. You will believe this when I tell you that a girl who came out in the same steamer as ourselves, not at all pretty, and with very provincial manners, has already had four offers of marriage. This will show you what an excellent hunting-ground there is here, and how different is the conduct of the men from the indifference which they sometimes exhibit in England."

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"He's a regular brick," he said to Dorothy, when they were alone. "Can't think what he sees in us to be so good. Why, he's the sort of fellow who does things not merely because it pleases him, but because he thinks he ought to be good to his fellow-creatures." The color went slowly out of Dorothy's face, and then came rushing back.

"Tom," she said, "do you think that is why he has done this? If so, I would a thousand times rather—"

"No, don't be a donkey," said Tom. "But he is an awfully good fellow. Why, last year, Doll, I got into no end of a mess about that boat of a boat, and was awfully in debt, and at last I told Blakesley, and asked him to lend me some tin, and he wouldn't."

"Well?" asked Dorothy, not seeing that this story was redounding to the honour and glory of the one interloping Blakesley.

"He said it would ruin me if I began borrowing money; it ruined almost every fellow who tried it on; and so he wouldn't unless he found I absolutely couldn't pull through without; then he investigated everything, and bullied me well, and helped me, and got me all straight again, and went down to the office, and made them keep me on. Blakesley's an awful brick, I mean to say, and I shall be as glad as possible to see his old spider-leg chairs and crockery about the place."

"Yes," she said; "but if he only does it—"

"Now, look here, Doll, I think you ought to know him well enough to leave his motives alone, and trust to their being all right, I do, at any rate. Besides, think how the old folks will kick with delight at going back to the old place; you have no business to do them out of that pleasure, just because you have taken an idle notion into your head."

"No," she said, after a pause, "you are right, I haven't." And so the matter was settled; but Dorothy was not happy about it. The fact is, Dorothy was not happy at all; the long strain on her energies had tired her, and her face was getting worn and thin. George Blakesley noticed the difference.

"You want rest," he said; "rest, and quiet, and freedom from care, and I think you work too hard."

"Oh no," she said; "I shall be well again soon."

"You must try," he said, cheerily, "and now I want to tell you something. I go out of my house to-morrow, so you can have the things moved in. My servants will help you, and Tom says he means to work hard at it, because, of course, you have your teaching to do in the day. Then when all is ready you can give every one a surprise; and, Dorothy, make your father and mother understand that they are really doing me a kindness in taking charge of the things. And I don't think I shall be round again, for I am going down to Oxford to visit some old friends in the morning, and I shall not be back till the day before I start for America."