Par"n

Subject
The Bridge of Mother Love

NO 43

LDC 7
THE BRIDGE
or
MOTHER-LOVE.

Along the side of rocky steep
Abrupt by many spring-cascades,
Beside a ridge of stony heaps,
Extends a pasture of mountain glades.

Against an oak, whose arms are wide,
A shepherd leans in thoughtful mood;
His faithful dog stays by his side
To watch the master, sheep and food.

To-day how hot the mid-day sun!
How parched the surface of the mead!
The panting sheep in groups now run
For springs to search and fresher feed.

In vain with bleatings oft, they go
To knolls so green in ferns and brake
Or rush to hollows smooth and low,
With hope their urgent thirst to slake.
"Poor flock! poor flock!" the pastor's cry,
As now he springs to wonted sense;
"They hunger, thirst and almost die,
In-hemmed this way by rugged fence!"

"For knolls and little vales are dry;
The leaves and bushy tufts are gone;
And streamlets 'neath this lurid sky
To sea or upper air have flown."

"So all the day the sheep go round,
And with their plaints my ears they fill;
They've gnawed the rootlets of the ground
And dried the very springs and rill."

"Well, Rover, come; let's search the glen,
The canyon-slope and other shore,
Perchance there's grass or moist'ned fen
Beyond "the cut" in ample store!"

Then out from under the shady oak,
The sturdy man, with knowing friend,
Away beyond the restless flock
The two with zeal their footsteps bend.
While o'er the hills and 'cross the sands
See, how he scans the distant fields;
With back to the mount, his dog he leads
With hope to a step which quickness yields.

But all of a sudden the two now meet
A canyon, a gulch, obstructing them sore;
The stones are loose plunge down the steep,
And waken thereby a continuous roar.

The good dog examines that puzzled face,
While searches the man the deep ravine.

And see, how he quickens his lengthy pace,
As a bridge is revealed to his vision keen.

Some huge rocks fallen from either shore,
Have high in air once met half way;

'Gainst these abutting some logs, just four,
Had made a bridge with rocky "stay."

Over this foot-bridge quickly they went,
And found for their flock their choicest greed;
For grass so in plenty and water unspent
Were widely spread for all their need.
Now back in the heat ast fast as he could,
Our shepherd staunch, betook his return;
And Rover tripped on, as ever he would,
His master's object to discern.

The bleating sheep were gathered fast,
And to the gulch were driven apace;
But the long bridge they hurried past,
Nor man nor dog could check the race.

Again the shepherd sought his sheep,
And gathered them slowly, as bees their queen.
He coaxed and called them to the steep,
And strove to master the wide ravine.

But, no, indeed! each knowing ewe
Would break from Rover's ready start,
And away, away! the whole flock flew,
To worry again the shepherd's heart.

So over and over the patient guards
Endeavored, in might, to save their sheep;
But vain the effort, because their wards
Ne'er guessed the tender blades to reap.
At last the gentle heart bethought
A plan by him as yet untried:
"Like mother-love, there sure is naught,
So good, so true, so strong beside!"

He sprightly seized a little lamb
And hugged him safely to his breast,
And walked before the bleating dam,
And thus led over the deep abyss.

With mother-heart above her fear,
She followed close her lamb beloved,
And other sheep, the way so clear,
Then took in flock the road improved!

Then, Oh! the joy of pastures new!
And water fresh, with browsing good,
The danger past, the fears are few,
And glad the sheep partake their food!

May not the better Shepherd high,
Enwrap to gentle breast a child,
And take him far, above the sky,
Across all torrents, threat'ning wild?
May not the mother's deepest love,  
By faith and instinct see the bridge  
From lower earth to Heaven above,  
And so to hope give strongest pledge?

May not a father choked with grief,  
Who of his best has been bereaved,  
Behold in vision, by clear relief,  
The chasm passed, the child redeemed?

Up-lift thy soul, thou stricken friend!  
To catch the beauty of the scene!  
Prepare thy stubborn will to bend,  
And let such glory lead thee in!

O. O. Howard.