

IN THE TWILIGHT SIDE BY SIDE.

By RUTH LAMB.

PART X.

ON KEEPING ONE'S WORD.

"He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much" (St. Luke xvi. 10).



HERE is a common saying which I daresay you, my dear girl friends, have often heard applied to persons who were remarkable for the strictness with which they fulfilled every engagement. "Their word is as good as their bond."

The meaning is obvious. With such persons a promise is a sacred matter, and once given, it is as certain to be fulfilled as though they were legally bound to keep it.

How delightful it is to be able to use this old aphorism in connection with those whom we meet in social life, and their conduct in relation to the simplest matters. The saying involves so much, and, when applied to anyone, it is a grand tribute to individual character. Business life, social and home life, personal convenience and comfort, all depend largely on the faithful fulfilment of promises.

What a difference it makes to us if we have made an engagement with a person, and we can say to ourselves, "I need have no anxiety about it. She always keeps her word."

On the other hand, if an uneasy feeling is suggested by the memory of past delinquencies, and we have to say, "My time may be lost. She is not to be depended upon," the interval is haunted by doubt, which often ends in disappointment.

There are many girls, and, I am afraid, older people also, who fail to keep their word, and who break their promises with little thought or care for the inconvenience and disappointment they cause to others. They excuse themselves with the reflection that the promise was about a trifling matter, and therefore, the breaking of it was of small moment also.

If nothing else were involved, good manners demand that if we have accepted an engagement or made an appointment we should keep it, if possible. But if we are disciples of Christ, we have something to consider which is above and beyond good manners, however important these may be. We have the example of God's faithfulness to us. "For He is faithful" in His promises, His commandments, His pledges to forgive and to bless His children. One great subject of exultant song, amongst the psalmists of old, was the faithfulness of the God in whom they trusted. Just a few words as instances of this.

"I have declared Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation," "It is a good thing," "To show forth Thy loving kindness in the morning and Thy faithfulness every night," "Thy counsels

of old are faithfulness and truth," "Great is Thy faithfulness."

Look at the character of our Master, Christ. Was He not faithful in doing the work He came to do—faithful unto death?

Such a Master should have faithful servants, and, as I have tried to show you, the Spirit which animated Him, should at all times and in all things be manifest in us.

Do you say, "Christ came to do the greatest work of all. I try to imitate Him in all the most important duties I have to do. But I do not pretend that I am perfect, and I do not expect to be, and most girls fail in such small things as keeping engagements and unimportant promises."

We admitted this at the beginning of our talk, and I add, "Pity that it should be true."

Now let us notice our text for a moment. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much." These are Christ's very words. Does it surprise you, my dear ones, that He gives the little things the foremost place? You and I, in our ignorance, would probably have reversed things, just as we do in daily life. We should have decided that whoever was faithful in great matters, would be absolutely trustworthy in the smallest details. Christ taught otherwise. In the parable of the talents, the man who had but one talent to account for made no use of it, and lost all. The others, who used a small trust to the best advantage, had greater things confided to them. It was their faithfulness in the small things which proved their fitness for higher responsibility.

Now I want to impress upon you, the dear companions of many happy evenings, the importance of faithfulness in every little thing.

There are two causes which have much to do with want of faith in social matters. One is thoughtlessness, the other selfishness.

We make promises without considering whether we have a reasonable prospect of keeping them. We are sometimes selfish enough to fail in keeping an engagement because, since we made it, some more attractive invitation has reached us. Sooner than forego this prospect of greater pleasure, our first pledge is deliberately broken, and those to whom we gave it are disappointed.

Let me illustrate my meaning by real incidents.

A friend of mine who leads a busy professional life incidentally met a girl student at the house of a mutual acquaintance. They were sitting together, and got into conversation on a subject of mutual interest. The girl appeared to be specially charmed at their meeting, and spoke so enthusiastically about her studies as to rouse the sympathy of her listener.

"No member of my own family has similar tastes to mine," she said, "neither have I any friend to whom I can speak freely about the work so near to my heart. I would give anything if I had some one who would enter, even a little, into my hopes and anxieties, and tell me frankly whether I have a reasonable chance of success to reward years of hard work."

The elder lady was interested. She was a hard worker too, and time was valuable to her in every sense. For a fortnight to come she could only count on one free evening, and this was to have been devoted to pleasant relaxation. She was, however, one whose first thought was usually, "What

can I do to help my neighbour?" And as she listened to the girl's regrets, she said to herself, "I will give up my one spare evening. This girl is in earnest, and needs just what I am able to do for her."

An invitation followed, and was accepted with effusive thanks. Some days later, she who had given it was tempted to put off the girl's visit to a more convenient time, and had she thought only of self-gratification she might have done so. But she was faithful in the least things. Her word was as good as her bond. She told the friend who had planned a special pleasure for her, that she had made an engagement and must keep it.

"You know how much I should like to join your party," she said; "but I cannot break my word to this girl. I was quite carried away by her earnestness in her work."

"I hope the girl will keep her word," was the reply.

"You speak as if you doubted it. Do you think she will not come? She seemed so delighted to have the opportunity."

"I should not like to say that she will not; but she has so often failed to keep her engagements with me, that I have ceased to invite her. Surely she will value the privilege of an evening with you, especially as she knows how fully your time is occupied."

The friends parted—the one certainly disappointed, the other left in doubt as to whether her self-denial would be in vain. Judging by her own faithfulness, and willing to think kindly of her new acquaintance, she put doubt aside.

When the evening came, a prettily-spread table, to which special dainties had been added, awaited the guest; but these and the hostess waited in vain. If she could have looked in at the girl's home, she would have seen her comfortably ensconced by the fireside.

The evening was cloudy. A friend had dropped in and had been induced to stay; and the girl, having decided that by breaking her promise she could have a pleasant time at home and save herself the trouble of walking a mile to keep her engagement, wrote a so-called apology and prepared to enjoy herself.

Here selfishness and want of consideration for another were shown, to say nothing of bad manners.

If the girl had written soon enough, her kindly acquaintance might have been spared a lonely evening, and her friend the being deprived of her society.

There is a very real pleasure in foregoing something for the sake of doing a kindness; but it is hard to be robbed of it by the knowledge that the one we wished to serve has made the sacrifice fruitless.

At this moment I seem to see again after the lapse of many years a girl's face at a window glowing with bright anticipation. The girl as I then saw her was very tastefully and carefully dressed, every item having been chosen to adorn the beautiful face and figure of her who wore it. One felt instinctively that she was waiting for the coming of him by whose side she looked forward to spending her future life.

An hour later she was still waiting, but fear had taken the place of bright hopefulness. Something must have happened, she was sure. He would never break his word to her. Another hour. Still she waited, and then anxiety gave place to indignation. If there had been anything serious—illness, for instance—to prevent his coming, she would have been told first of all.