

IN THE TWILIGHT SIDE BY SIDE.

By RUTH LAMB.

PART II.

INVISIBLE WALL-BUILDING.

"A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city (Proverbs xviii. 19).



are going to talk to-night about the building of a wall, and the part we may any of us take in such a work. You look first at me, then at each other, as though you doubted the testimony of your ears. I fancy I can read your thoughts, my dear girl-friends, and guess the questions suggested by such a strange announcement.

"What have such as we to do with wall-building? We are girls, not sturdy masons, able to shape and place stones, or skilled workmen to embellish them with fair devices. What do we know about the laying of bricks or the preparing of mortar? Girls and women have entered on many new occupations, but thus far none of us have sought to compete with the mason or to scale his scaffolding in order to labour side by side with him. Are you, our twilight companion, adviser and often our confidant, going to suggest that the strong amongst us should learn to lay bricks or carry the hod, as labourers in wall-building?"

No, dear ones. Far be it from me to wish that you should share in such rough work; though I could well imagine that many of you would delight to chisel out dainty designs and delicate tracery on stone or marble. Are there not already famous sculptors of the gentler sex?

The wall we are going to talk of may be built by any person, young, old, or of either sex. It is unlike all other walls, for it is invisible and intangible. We know it is there, but we cannot touch it, and those who built it often desire earnestly to demolish it, but are powerless to do so. When once erected, it is harder to pull down than the strongest brick-work built by the most skilful artisans.

You smile at each other. You think I am proposing some riddle for you to guess; or it may be that my thoughts have wandered back to some fairy legend, such as we all delighted in as children, some story of a wondrous castle which sprang up in a night and disappeared even more quickly. Not so. The wall I speak of has human builders, though no tool is wielded in erecting it. True, its foundations may be laid in a moment, and at times, even unconsciously; but they generally lie deep and are not easily uprooted.

If you have not already guessed my meaning, pause for a moment and look back on your own home life, your past friendships and those of your acquaintances. Your hearts will tell you whether between yourselves and your kindred or the friends whom you once held dear, a wall of separation has sprung up such as I have described—invisible, but dense enough to darken one part of your daily life, and strong enough to hinder the old, happy intercourse. I have said before that lives may drift apart by force of circumstances and friends be lost sight of without fault on either side. Members of one family may be so far from each other that their very existence is doubtful,

Yet the fire of true love may still burn in the heart, and a message, a letter, or a meeting will cause it to break into a flame. It only waited an opportunity to show what was always there. The extended arms, the hearty hand-clasp, the light on the countenance, the voice that trembles whilst uttering words of welcome, all prove that love has stood the test of absence. Even in cases where the intercourse of old friends has been wholly suspended, they meet again with gladness, if they parted with good-will towards each other, though they cannot begin just where they left off. On the other hand, if one of these invisible walls of separation has sprung up, kindred may dwell under the same roof, and those who were once friends may even meet in necessary intercourse and yet be more widely separated than they would be if the ocean rolled between them. The ocean can be crossed in a few days. An invisible wall of partition may rise, higher and higher, and the efforts of a lifetime will not demolish it.

Let us note a few of the invisible stones, if I may use the term, which go to the building of such a wall. Some of them will seem very insignificant, almost contemptible to you as you hear them named. Well for you, my dear girl-friends, if you never know by experience how much mischief they can do. We will look into the home first of all for some of them. Little mysteries, petty jealousies, envy, selfishness. An ugly list, and the items which compose it are not confined to the home, but are found everywhere. The materials for building walls of separation are sown broadcast and are within everybody's reach. It is always delightful to look into a home where the spirit of trust, sympathy and affection reigns, where the sorrows and joys of one member are such to all, and each is stronger and happier for the presence of the others. In such a home invisible walls of separation are unknown.

Let us look into another home in which there is, we will say, one girl who declines to share in the confidences common to all the rest. One who likes to hear all that others are willing to tell, but gives them her confidence with reservations. She likes to have her little mysteries. For instance. She reads part of a letter, the contents of which she knows would interest all around her. There would be no breach of trust in reading the whole, but, in order to look important, she pauses midway, smiles mysteriously, folds up her letter and pockets it as if afraid of the rest of its contents being read against her will. She habitually keeps back a portion of every communication, not because there is anything to need secrecy, but she wants to convey the idea that she is trusted beyond other members of the family. She keeps a bit of interesting news to herself in order that when it reaches them she may be able to say, "Oh, I knew that long ago!" "Then why did you not tell us?" will be asked. "I did not choose. I had my reason for not doing so." The natural consequence of such conduct will be plain to you all. Mysterious airs, self-conscious smiles, the locking up of every scrap of correspondence and the generally superior manner assumed even towards elder brothers and sisters, can have but one result. I need add nothing to my description of the girl who delights in little mysteries, and, alas, similar characters may be found amongst older people of both sexes as well as amongst young men and maidens, for your looks tell me that such are no strangers to you, my dear girls.

An occasional meeting with a cherisher of little mysteries may excite amusement only,

but it is a different matter if one of the type is a member of your own family, for he or she is sure to lay the foundations of an invisible wall of separation. The others would probably laugh at first and refuse to notice such childish conduct; but, if persisted in, they would naturally feel pained by it. Then, unless they were possessed of more than an average share of the love which is "not easily provoked," anger and retaliation would follow, and the lover of little mysteries would find herself left alone in the cold. She would be excluded from the full confidence hitherto freely given, and the invisible wall of separation would rise higher and higher. You and I cannot trace results to the end, but I could give you more than one instance of girls who, by such conduct as I have described, shut themselves out of the inner circle of home and family. They built up walls of separation, and when they found themselves on the wrong side of them, had only their own folly to blame for it.

In our second talk a year ago on "Friendship in the Family," I alluded to petty jealousies and their results. All of us must agree that families and societies where little jealousies are absolutely unknown, are by no means common. Self is always present, and self wants the best share of whatever it or the world deems most to be desired. It was just the same in olden times. It began in the first human family. Envy and paltry jealousy built the first wall of separation between the two earliest born sons of our race, and we know how fearful were the results. All the way down the ages history has repeated itself, and, though incidents have varied, the spirit shown and its consequences have been fruitful of evil. Let us look part of the way back to the time when our Master, Christ, walked the earth as man.

We can picture Him as He taught the many who crowded round Him, and we can imagine how the heart of that young man who "had large possessions" was stirred by His loving words, and by the sight of the little children whom the disciples would have sent away, but whom Jesus welcomed and blessed with tenderest touch of His kind hands, the while He spoke that benediction. Surely it must be delightful to follow such a Master. So the young man came to Jesus to know on what terms he too might be His disciple and inherit eternal life. He could promptly and cheerfully reply that he had kept the commandments of God from his youth, but Christ knew where lay the stumbling-block. Wealth and the world lay nearest to the questioner's heart. It would cost him too much to give up these. True, his wealth might be God-given, but, if he were to part with it for the sake of being enroled amongst the followers of this new teacher whose words had excited a longing after the eternal life He spoke about, the gift might as well have been withheld. He would like to know how to inherit eternal life, but without giving up his worldly wealth. The poor and the needy were little to him in comparison. Why should he scatter his gold amongst them? The cross that lay across his path was too heavy. He could not stoop to lift it in order to become the disciple of Christ. So he went away sorrowful, because he wanted the greatest blessing, yet would not part with perishable wealth to win it.

I always feel sorrowful too, when I read this story, for are we not plainly told that as the young man drew near "Jesus beholding him loved him." Thank God. If these precious words are not now said, with reference to each trembling inquirer after eternal life, our