

copied stones. A mere grain of sand at first, it has been magnified into a mountain, and now the invisible wall defies every effort to demolish it.

The worst of it is that the warmer may have been the friendship, the closer the relationship, the more difficult will it be to rekindle it and to reunite those whom the merest trifle may have severed.

You will remember, dear girls, the text I quoted as we began our talk a month ago: "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city," and it is easy to understand why this should be.

A passing acquaintance may be very pleasant but very soon ended. It is like a tiny shrub which is easy to transplant and which will quickly adapt itself to a new soil and neighbourhood. The love or friendship of a warm, true heart is like a stately oak whose roots spread far below the surface and, though unseen, give stability to the tree. But if the oak should be uprooted by a sudden storm, it cannot be replaced. As it lies prone on the ground to which it is just united by a few root fibres, it may even put out a few green leaves on the branches nearest to this source of sustenance, but they will not last. The real life is gone.

So it is with great friendships that have been rudely broken. The hurricane which tore up the oak and destroyed the growth of ages may have come and gone in a few hours.

The careless work that began the building of a wall of separation between very friends was spoken in a moment, but it demolished the growth of many happy years. The attempt to restore things to the old footing is like trying to plant anew the shattered oak. The lingering regrets of the erstwhile friends and the yearnings for the old companionship are somewhat like the few green leaves which sprang from the prostrate oak—they fade under the combined influences already named. Silence, pride, obstinacy.

It is a happy thing for us if we can look back upon some occasion in our early lives when affection and faith or even forgetfulness conquered the effects produced by hasty words and prevented a breach of friendship. I smile to myself sometimes as I recall one such instance.

I had a schoolfellow between whom and myself a very warm affection existed. We were called the inseparables, for we walked and worked together. Neither envied the other any school distinction. We were in the same class, but each was contented with the second place provided her friend held the first; but we worked and fought together as one, so that no third girl should pass us in the race. My home was about midway between hers and the school, so she invariably called for me on her way thither. Returning, I am afraid we spent a good deal of our time in walking to and fro with each other, so loth were we to part, and we were scolded for being late at dinner.

One day we disagreed about something. Each was sure the other was wrong and neither would give in. We parted in haste. We were early at the dinner-table, but I can answer for myself that my usually healthy appetite was absent, and what food I took was not enjoyed.

We had parted in silence after declaring that we would not speak to each other again; but I was already distressed at the remembrance of our quarrel and hopeful that my friend might be the same. Would she call for me? I asked myself. I would be ready and on the watch earlier than usual; but if she passed the house without turning to look for me, I would keep to my resolution and not even speak. She should go her way and I would go mine.

I watched and waited in vain. There was more than one road to school. She must have

taken the other to avoid meeting me, I said to myself. My heart swelled with indignation, for I had hoped almost against hope and made myself late for school, all in vain. Moreover Louise was absent. I had dreadful thoughts on this score. Had she contrived to stay away because of our quarrel?

I lost two places in class and failed to regain them before I heard from another schoolfellow that she had brought a message to our governess to excuse Louise's absence. "Her aunt is here, but only for the day, so her mother is keeping her at home this afternoon," said the girl. I was comforted after this and recovered one place.

On the following morning Louise met me as usual, and with a smiling face began to tell me of her aunt's visit and of some pretty presents she had brought and which I must go to see.

Coming home, Louise stopped suddenly at the point on the road where we had parted the day before. "We quarrelled here yesterday," she said. "We were not going to speak or be friends any more. I had forgotten all about it. Must we stop talking now?" Blessed forgetfulness! It prevented the building of a wall of separation, the severance of a friendship, and the extinguishing of a love which lasted till death claimed one of us. Aye, and it lasts still in the heart of the survivor.

This may seem a childish story perhaps, but I, after the lapse of many years, rejoice as I look back upon it and thank God that sweet memories were not spoiled and sweet intercourse ended through the nursing of a little grievance on either side.

"Silence is golden," as a rule, but there are many exceptions to it. The silence which is the result of pride or obstinacy has in it no ring of the precious metal. It is the veriest dross to be trampled under foot and contemned.

It would take a long time to instance all the stones that help to build walls of separation, but injudicious meddling and tale-bearing follow closely on those already named.

Sometimes it happens that one who has taken offence at a mere trifle begins to think she may have attached too much importance to a very little matter. Or if she has nursed a grievance she becomes tired of it, and feels that it is interfering with her own peace of mind. She discovers that the blame rests partly on herself, for has she not put the worst possible construction on what has been said or done?

Unfortunately the meddler comes in and begins by condoling, then with busy tongue harps upon the little grievance, which under such treatment gains renewed importance. The meddler has become the mischief-maker. She urges the aggrieved one not to give in, but to show a proper spirit. "A proper spirit!" What is it? Let us look at the life of our Lord and Master. Let us listen to His teaching. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." "Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you. Pray for them which despitefully use you." "Judge not and ye shall not be judged. Condemn not and ye shall not be condemned." "Be ye tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Deal thus with those who have offended you, and you shall find that the only proper spirit is the Christlike spirit, which you, if you are His disciple, are bound to imitate. We have another side of the subject to look at before we leave it. The over-sensitive or unhappily self-conscious amongst our friends and neighbours who take offence at nothing and nurse grievances or meet them half-way, demand alike our pity and kindly consideration. No true disciple of Christ would take advantage of such failings to inflict a needless wound. If you and I are Christians we shall be specially tender and careful in word and

deed when we are in the presence of such, lest we should cause a weak one to offend.

"Support the weak, be patient toward all."

I must mention a few more of the stones which go towards building invisible walls of separation, but without many words of comment. After all our talk on the subject you will find it easy to judge of the mischief they do. Tale-bearing, "the whisperer separateth very friends." Breach of trust. A suspicious temper. Prejudice. Envy. Selfishness. Impatience. The "jesting which is not convenient." Do we not all know how often sensitive natures have been wounded and friends separated by a foolish jest? There is an old saying, "Those who cannot take a jest should never make one," but as we cannot be sure who will appropriate the jesting speech that carries a sting, we should be doubly careful not to mingle venom with our mirth.

I should not like to end our talk to-night, my dear ones, without a word in allusion to another invisible wall of partition of which we are builders, and in which the very stones we have spoken about are part of the materials that go towards its erection.

A prophet of old cried out to God's ancient people, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." And is it not so to-day with each and all of us who are oppressed with a sense of sin, planned or committed. Do we not feel it rising like a dark shadow between us and Him to whom we owe "life and breath and all things." It stifles the coming prayer, it lifts us from our knees and moves us to shun instead of seeking God's presence. We long for it, yet flee from it, because we are afraid. We know that we do not deserve a welcome. The sins known to us are enough to build up the wall. What of the unnumbered ones? "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?"

Peter was bold of speech and act, boastful too, as we all know; but he, once, in the early days of his Apostleship, understood something about what sin can do. He saw the marvellous draught of fishes and realised the power of the Godhead in Christ. He sank on his knees at the feet of Jesus saying, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Oh, my dear ones, if you and I are sensible of the power of sin in building a wall of separation between us and our God, let us not shrink away in silence and fear. Let us come the oftener to His footstool and pray the more. Let us not say "Depart from me," but "Lord, bring me near to Thee." "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe." "Cleanse thou me from my secret faults." "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Remember what Isaiah said as to the separating power of sin, but thank God also with heart and voice for the Gospel message which brings gladness, comfort, strength, and peace.

We may have vainly looked for a mediator between us and an aggrieved earthly friend; but we have One who will never fail us, to mediate between us and our Father, God, and who is Himself the "way" to the throne of grace. The more we look for help and guidance in the Book of Books, the more we find to cheer and comfort us. We need not want words. God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask, and we shall be taught how to speak, or without words, the heart-longings we cannot utter will go up to Our Father through our great Intercessor.

We are met half-way by sweet messages, and the invisible wall which our sins have raised between us and God will vanish into nothingness as we listen to the proclamation, "Be ye reconciled to God." "Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition."