

The summer day faded, and, late in the evening, came the truant *fiancé* with a poor excuse for his broken promise.

"I met an old college friend quite unexpectedly," he said. "He will leave the neighbourhood to-morrow, and he was anxious to have a chat; so we took a long walk, had tea at a village eight miles away, and came back by train. I knew you would not mind my leaving you for once, as this was my only opportunity of being with my college chum."

Further inquiry showed that at the time the two met, they were only a few minutes' walk from the house where the girl stood waiting.

"If I had only known, I should have been glad to think you were with an old friend. You could have called to tell me, without any inconvenience, and saved me from hours of waiting and anxiety. It hurts me to think you broke your word, and cared so little about my feelings as not even to step aside for my sake."

The offender made light of the matter, laughed at the foolish fancies which had made the girl unhappy on his account, and said:—

"When I did not come at the time, you should have gone out with your own people. As to breaking my word, it is ridiculous to suggest such a thing. I was on my way to keep it."

"And might easily have done it. Had you been a long way off, you would have had a better excuse."

The incident changed the future of two lives. The girl was scrupulous in keeping her word about the smallest matter, and she had noticed that, since her engagement, her *fiancé* had become less particular in this respect.

She said to herself, "If he is not faithful in little things, he will not be in great ones," and broke off the engagement.

A very common excuse for social breaches of faith is, "I am so sorry, but I quite forgot."

Children often plead this, and are met with the reply, "I will teach you to remember," and a sharp lesson follows. But grown-up girls cannot be taught in the same fashion. They must be voluntary learners, and practise lessons in good faith towards others, and unselfishness in keeping every promise. Think, first of all. Then give your word, and, having given it, keep it even to your own hurt and inconvenience, or at the cost of self-sacrifice.

I picture two girls—real ones, whom I knew. The elder would undertake any commission, promise to deliver messages, post letters—do anything to oblige. She meant to keep her word. But the article she was to have brought was rarely forthcoming; the message seldom reached its destination; the letters would be found, often in a crumpled condition, in her pocket or satchel days after they had been entrusted to her. Then she would look penitent, and say, "I quite forgot." But that could not undo the harm caused by her omissions. Somebody said, "Nelly is the family 'Dead Letter Office.'" "She is not so good as that," retorted another sister. "The real 'Dead Letter Office'

returns what it cannot deliver. If Nelly takes a letter, one never knows what will become of it."

Naturally, Nelly soon came to be regarded as a person not to be trusted, and a much less clever member of the family was put in her place. This one had, naturally, a bad memory, but, conscious of the defect, she strove to correct it. A little notebook was in constant requisition.

"I want to keep my word," she said; "and, as my memory is not good, I use an artificial one," holding up her tiny notebook.

Those who knew her learned to say, "Rose is not as clever as Nelly, but she is something better. If she makes a promise, she keeps it. She never says, 'I forgot,' and she is always to be trusted."

I had a talk, a little while ago, with a dear girl friend about the injury inflicted by those who accept invitations, and needlessly disappoint, not merely their entertainers, but the friends who, but for their acceptance, might have filled the vacant places. We spoke more especially of a friend's disappointment in receiving excuses from nearly a fourth of her expected guests, when it was too late to invite others. She had been careful to ask only as many as could be accommodated with comfort, and it had been very difficult to choose out of a large circle of friends.

"Must not every hostess count on some disappointments, and ought she not to calculate on them in sending invitations?" said my young friend.

"True," I replied; "and no one would find fault with really unavoidable absences. But we have no right to make engagements with mental reservations; to send a definite acceptance, and say to ourselves, 'I shall go, if nothing more attractive comes in the way—my convenience is not interfered with, or indolence does not prevent at the last moment.'"

Want of faith is morally hurtful to ourselves, and causes the friends whose standard is higher than our own to lose confidence in us. We rob others of what they would have enjoyed and valued had we not given our word, only to break it.

It generally happens that those who are careless about keeping promises, are by no means ready to excuse the same bad fault in another. You and I, dear girl friends, know well that if the new party dress did not arrive in time, as promised, we should be very apt to say hard things and be angry with the dress-maker, whose breach of faith had lost us an evening's enjoyment.

There are many people, young and old, who are careful about keeping their word to outsiders, but very careless when those at home are concerned. They seem to think that a broken promise matters less if only members of their own family are inconvenienced by it. The mother says to her girls, "You must not be late," and names the hour at which they are to return. The girls assent, perhaps they promise to be in time, then go away, and, absorbed in social enjoyments, never give a second thought to those who are

waiting for them. "Mother will not mind," says one. "If father were at home I should be obliged to go. He is so particular about hours." Of course mother does mind, but fathers are proverbially less indulgent than mothers, and apt to be sterner in dealing with a fault. This fact should make girls more particular, for the more tender the nature, the more easily is it hurt.

The knowledge that our nearest and dearest will be silent about our faults and most ready to shield us from any evil consequences, should put us upon our honour to give them as little cause for complaint as possible. It is not good for ourselves to be held to our word merely by the fear of what outsiders will say or of possible penalties.

The girl who would sacrifice a pleasure rather than bring a tear to a child's eyes by a broken promise; the girl who withstands the entreaty to stay "just a little longer," and leaves a bright circle at the height of its enjoyment, because she has given her word; the young servant whose "night out" has been abridged by unexpected work beforehand but who, in spite of that, returns home to the very minute; the little milliner, new to business and to whom employment is all important, yet who refuses a good order because she cannot fulfil it without breaking her word to an earlier and less valuable customer—furnish us with examples worthy of all honour. To quote again the old aphorism, "Their word is as good as their bond." They keep it from a sense of right, and in accordance with the teaching of God's word, and the spirit of Christ.

If any amongst you to whom I speak are careless about keeping your word, and promise without thought, only to fail without regret, think what it would be for us, who depend for everything on the faithfulness of God, were He to fail us.

"The Lord said, While the earth remaineth seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

This promise has been kept for thousands of years, and we go on from day to day, expecting our daily bread, because "He is faithful that promised." So, with all other temporal blessings, so too as regards our highest interests. Because our Father is a God that cannot lie, we accept His invitations assured of a welcome. We confess our sins and plead for pardon because "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

If God were not true to His word, we might bid farewell to present peace; and all hope of future blessedness would vanish like vapour.

What, dear girls, shall be the outcome of our talk to-night? I trust it will help us all to be careful in giving our word, but having given it, to hold a promise, even about the smallest matter, as a sacred thing. It is the attribute of our God to be faithful. We cannot be His true children and servants unless we are faithful in the least things as well as in the greatest.

