

VISITORS.



THE increased facilities for travelling in this nineteenth century have very much conduced to the practice of entertaining visitors. Half a century ago people paid fewer visits, and those generally of longer duration than at present. In these days, everyone possessing a spare room,

or able to extemporise one *pro tem.*, likes to ask a friend to stay with them. Now, an invitation should be given for a definite time, and in this there is no breach of courtesy whatever. It is far more convenient for hostess and guest if the latter is invited to "come and spend a week," or "a month," or "from Saturday to Monday," as the case may be, than, as often happens, to be asked to come and stay "a little while," or to "come on a visit to us."

Most people, especially those who number a great many friends and acquaintances, have to make their visits fit one with another, and this is impossible unless you have given your guest some idea of the length of time you expect him to remain with you.

Another drawback to this uncomfortable vagueness is, that you may also wish to invite other guests, and so cannot arrange for their visit.

Your visitor, too, may be able to regulate his or her luggage by the length of the invitation, as the same amount of clothes, etc., is not required for a visit of a few days as that of some weeks. Should you desire to lengthen the stay of your guest, it is perfectly easy to press him to remain; but in the first instance of giving the invitation, name a definite time.

Should you not be possessed of a house-keeper, see yourself that the room intended for your visitor is in perfect order. This should not be left to servants, as it needs the eye of the hostess to note if everything in all great and minor details is provided for the comfort of the in-comer. Who does not know the discomfort of hunting about in vain for matches, or finding that the blinds will not work, and that the key in the door of the room is evidently intended for an ornament, as no amount of persuasion by gentleness or force will compel it to turn in the lock?

Night lights ready for use should be left in the room, for some people are nervous at night, and like a light; so that it should be there for them to burn or not, as they please.

All the wardrobes and chests of drawers in a guest's room should be left empty. People

like to feel that they have the room for the time being to themselves, and this comfortable sensation is completely destroyed if they are liable to be invaded at various times by the owners of those possessions which are laid away in drawers or hung on pegs, which they only wish had been left free for their own articles of attire.

There should always be a writing-table in a guest's room, and this well provided with a blotting case, an inkstand filled with ink, and pens that, on demand, will write. A relative of my own, who is gifted with forethought, always fills the said blotter in her visitors' rooms with plenty of writing paper, envelopes, address luggage labels, telegraph forms, and post cards; and, too, she anticipates the enquiry as to when the post goes out, by having the hours legibly written on a card and placed on the chimney-piece. If the windows have the unpleasant habit of shaking, pegs should be provided for them, as a light sleeper tries in vain to yield himself to "Nature's soft nurse," if every wind that blows sends a rattling of the window in the frame.

If it is winter, see if your guest likes a fire; and if not, if a hot water jar would be welcome at night. Needless to say, the bed and sheets should be thoroughly aired.

You should make your visitor acquainted at once with the hours of meals, etc., and if you breakfast at a late hour, offer an early cup of tea to be brought to the bedroom. Many people who rise, or at least wake, very early, find it, especially if accustomed to an early breakfast, very trying to have to wait until a late one; and the temper of the guest, as well as his health, is apt to suffer by the delay.

Should you possess a family skeleton—and how few households there are destitute of one—lock him up in his cupboard, and on no account discuss with your visitor how very trying you find him.

If you have not a large income, and possess but a small staff of servants, you will necessarily have to see a good deal after domestic concerns yourself. Do this unobservably and quietly, as, if you appear to be extraordinarily busy, your visitor will be inclined to think that you are inconvenienced by his presence in your house, and that his being there adds to your trouble. Of course it does do the latter, but you need not thrust the fact upon his notice.

If you let your visitor see that you are not treating him with too much formality, and that you pursue your ordinary avocations as usual, he will feel much more at home than if you altered the whole routine of your day, and laboured incessantly to entertain him.

Always have your morning-room or drawing-room well provided with books and papers; and do not imagine that you can never leave your guest alone. Often he may thoroughly enjoy a few hours to himself, to pay up arrears of letter writing and read books; or if a lady, do needlework, for which time hitherto has failed.

If you take your guest to any distance by rail, omnibus, or cab, remember that these conveyances are used instead of a carriage, which, did your means permit, you would probably possess. Therefore, your guest need not pay his fare. This with middle-aged, old,

or very independent people, is not always easily managed; but in the case of people of narrow means on a visit it should be insisted upon. In the same way, the laundress expenses of any young person staying with you might be paid by yourself. It will be but a small expense, and if you can afford to have guests at all, you can manage to add that item to the necessary addition to your household expenses incurred by their visit. Young people, often with scant pocket money, will be very grateful to you in many cases.

In the very best regulated families the proverbial accident will occur sometimes. The butcher does not send the meat you had ordered; the drawing-room fire takes to smoking and you have to retire to the dining-room; you have forgotten to order that which your visitor can scarcely do without; your pony lames himself just as you had planned that charming drive; or your cook is taken ill, and perforce you have to reduce your *menu* to the capabilities of Sarah the housemaid. They cannot be helped; and these, as well as kindred *contretemps*, will happen, however much you may exercise forethought.

Take everything as calmly as you can, and do not make a fuss.

If you can laugh over the accident, and turn it off easily, so much the better; and your visitor will be far more at his ease if you do, than if you perpetually regret its having happened, and bemoan the matter continually.

As for apologies, beyond those necessitated at proper times by the rules of society and etiquette, the fewer there are of them the better. Do the best you can for your guest, and avoid more ceremony than you can help. Should he live in a different style from yourself, do not always be inwardly comparing your household with his, and spoiling your cheerfulness by mental regrets that you have not got a *cordon bleu* in the kitchen, and a James and a Thomas to assist your guest to his *chef d'œuvres*.

On the other hand, if your lot is cast where you have a well-appointed house and a first rate staff of servants, do not, if Mrs. Jones is staying with you (who perhaps lives in a small house or cheap lodgings) make her feel uncomfortable.

This, by want of tact, is often done by well-intentioned people, who treat their homely guest as if he must have come to be fattened up, not having sufficient food at home, or as if the unaccustomed exercise of a long drive must necessarily fatigue him terribly, etc.

As domestic sparring is so sad at all times, we earnestly wish that it did not exist; but as that is not always possible with our frail human nature, still a greater amount of restraint and guardedness should be exercised when your guest is with you. To be present at a war of words, to have to listen to Mrs. A— talking at Mr. A—, or things in kind, is to make a visitor feel most uncomfortable.

And, as a last word in this paper, which is more suggestive than exhaustive, *never* reprove a servant before company. Endure almost anything sooner than do that. It is a needless wounding of the feelings of your servant, and your guest's comfort is not by any means considered when you do so.

