

"THE PROPHET'S CHAMBER."

By ONE WHO OFTEN USES IT.



THE other day, in an Edinburgh "flat" I heard a phrase which I had not heard for many a day!

It was "the Prophet's Chamber."

The daughter of a great man, now dead, had been re-arranging the surroundings of her life. Years of dutiful and beautiful filial devotion had come to an end—the "family house" was no more, and the only maiden-daughter was free to make her own plans. She had retired to a pretty flat commanding views of

two of the busiest thoroughfares in the Northern capital, yet high enough above them to be beyond any disturbing roar of traffic.

As she showed me through her new home, rich with relics of that which had vanished, she explained to me—

"This room was meant for the drawing-room, but I mean it for the living-room. What is the use of two public rooms for one person?"

"Well," I admitted, "one can only sit in one room at a time."

A very pleasant "living-room" it was—lined with books, friendly with familiar portraits, and gay with souvenirs of foreign travel; a delightful place in which to have one's meals—at the square table in the centre—or to write at the desk which stood in one of the windows.

"Now," said she, "follow me into the room which was intended for a dining-room."

"There!" she said, as she ushered me in. "This is to be 'the prophet's chamber.' When I have guests they shall have this nice large cheerful room, which they can feel is all their own."

Besides every comfortable bedroom appointment, the chamber had a roomy writing-table, a bookcase, and an open sunny aspect.

"The prophet's chamber!"

My friend's experience in her great father's house had made her realise that visitors are not always idle people, running to and fro in pursuit of pleasure. She knew that they are sometimes busy people, whose work must go on, whatever their environment; or burdened people, who crave for a quiet retreat where they may drop down at their ease; or sad people who may find relief in a few unwatched tears.

That dear old phrase, "the prophet's chamber," has a dignity of significance far beyond that of the mere "spare room."

We all know that the phrase originated in the little chamber which the Shunammite woman kept in readiness for the passing by of Elisha, because she "perceived that he was a holy man of God." Little did she then dream of the power which his hand was to have in her life, both for sorrow and for joy!

Little do we imagine, oftentimes, what new threads our visitors are to weave into our own histories. We cannot tell beforehand when we shall "entertain angels unawares." Only we know we need not fear even the unthankful and the evil: we may actually learn the most from them: for through them we may attain life's best gift—the power to forgive.

When we approach our spare room as "the prophet's chamber," *i.e.*, as the temporary resting-place of human beings of infinite capacities and possibilities, we begin to realise that we have to show spiritual hospitality as well as bodily. We do not know all the inner history of our most

intimate guest. Even such outward circumstances as we do know may have significances which are beyond our fathoming!

One thing we do know—our visitor is not in his own house—is probably in the midst of one of those "moving-about" seasons, which may sometimes enrich years of after life. Let us be careful that he is able to make the most of every opportunity.

Does he want to write letters to the friends he left before he came to us? Take care that he is not hindered for lack of ink on the desk in "the prophet's chamber," and give him a wide choice of pens. Though one may put some of one's daintiest note-paper into the stationery stand, we won't forget a few sheets of scribbling paper. He may wish them for "notes" which may some day turn into poems or stories.

In some grand houses, peopled, too, by kind hearts, these things are, nevertheless, forgotten. One has seen the guest-chamber of a mansion (whose visitors were specially of the "literate" class) where there was absolutely no place where one could write, save by clearing a corner of the toilet-table, and running the risk of dropping ink on dainty napery!

And here we may make a very homely suggestion of detail. Don't over-burden the toilet-table with unnecessary nick-nacks. Space is the visitor's great desire. Do not put on a lace cover. For some of our visitors may be elderly or feeble or nervous, and a ring or a brooch or a pencil may slip through the meshes and temporarily disappear, so giving a great deal of dispeace to a visitor who does not want to be troublesome, and who yet dreads losing something that may be a valued keep-sake.

If he makes a fuss about the accident, then the whole house is turned upside down, till the lost is found—"under his very nose all the time," as the resentful servants will say. If he keeps silence, then the ring is found after he is gone, and is sent after him with the secret reflection, "How careless he was, not to miss it!" Let us spare all these worries. We cannot offer hospitality in any sweeter form than ease and "peace."

For the same reason let us see that there are no projecting nails or broken points of furniture to rend unwary garments, and let us be careful that all the blinds and locks are in good working order. Sometimes these things are of fair seeming and will work decently under experienced manipulation, yet when our guileless guest takes them for what they look, they break down, and he is made unhappy by a sense, which not all our explanations will remove, that he has damaged our property!

Let us, too, cultivate an hospitable sense in the choice of pictures and books for "the prophet's chamber." In the former some sense of humour will carry us far. It will save us from confronting our guest with an awe-striking engraving of Nathan convicting David, "Thou art the man," or greeting him with the inquiry, "What is home without a mother?"—which, by the way, we once saw hung, as in grim jest, in a public dining-room! As a rule, possibly, pleasant landscapes are the best, especially studies of views or buildings which our friend may see while he is with us. Or photographs of noble statuary. Or pretty floral wreaths. If among the host's cherished dead there is one the fame of whose goodness or greatness has overflowed private boundaries, a portrait may well grace "the prophet's chamber." It will be as a sacred welcome. The rule in the choice of pictures for "the prophet's chamber" is to consider what is cheerful and lovely and gracious.

If "the prophet's chamber" is large enough to contain a bookcase, the selection of books may be large enough and universal enough to be permanent, provided the

said book-case is not promptly made into a refuge for the weak-minded, a retreat for the incurable, and a home for the dying, from all other bookcases in the house.

Generally, however, a book-shelf is all that can find house-room. Then, if our guest is an intimate, his particular taste should be consulted. We should provide him with the books we should like to hear him discuss, or with some which bear directly on his tastes and aspirations. We must not leave books as fixtures while visitors change—milk-and-water fiction remaining for grave seniors, or a girl in her teens finding works on philosophy!

But when our visitors are comparatively strangers to us, there are two rocks from which we must steer carefully away—tragic literature and comic literature. Both may be absolutely cruel! We have known a young widow, who at one blow had lost husband and fortune, and who had just learned all the bitterness of life's injustice, whose probably well-meaning hosts provided nothing for her lonely moments save Hugo's *The Miserables* and Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. Why, she could almost have written those out of her own sore heart! They were not what she lacked! Yet worse still would have been a "comic annual," or the *Jokes of all Nations*. And worst of all, possibly, would have been that washy school of fiction which insists on universal "happy endings" in the vulgar form of "pretty weddings" and "big cheques," and which makes "all come right" by visible "machinery."

We cannot tell what may be astir in the heart or the life of the visitor whom we do not know very well. But there are some books which never come wrong to the glad or to the sorrowful, to those who abound, or to those who are abased. There is some poet of the type which Longfellow has so skilfully drawn—

"Whose songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer."

There are novels as wholesome and energising as Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*. We cannot particularise them. Let each ask himself, "What story made me wish to be better and to do better?" Well, that is the book we mean! There are parables of the love of God, such as Tolstoy's *What Men Live By*, which for ever after haunt the memory, like a strain of sweet music.

Do you know there is one book which may surely always lie in "the prophet's chamber," though visitors come and go, old and young, wise and simple, and that is a good collection of Hans Andersen's stories. Every child likes to hear the tale of *The Girl who Trod on a Loaf*, but what sage can get beyond it? And is not the tragedy of all genius since the world began contained in the great Dane's wonderful *Portuguese Duck*?

The Bible that is put in "the prophet's chamber" should be light to lift, and of good and clear print. The guest probably carries his own, and will generally use that.

Then last of all, "the prophet's chamber" must be surrounded by such genuine hospitality as embosoms that from which our story opened. The visitor must be welcomed—the very service he gets must not all be hireling service. He must be furthered in all his plans—the local time-tables must be made clear to him. At the last, "God speed" must follow him to the very door.

"No servant ever 'saw out' a visitor in my father's house," said my old friend, as she stepped down the long stone staircase to perform that ceremony for us, "and it is going to be the same here!"

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PRACTICAL POINTS OF LAW.

By A LAWYER.

PART V.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION.

It is the duty of every parent to have every child efficiently educated.

There are penalties for neglecting this duty.

Unless the parent has a reasonable excuse, such as, there not being, within two miles from the residence of the child, any public elementary school open which the child can attend.

Or the absence of the child from school has been caused by sickness or any unavoidable cause.

A child means a child between the ages of five and fourteen.

Every person who employs a child for the sake of gain, who is not attending a school, or has not obtained a certificate of school proficiency, renders himself liable to a penalty.

A parent includes any person *in loco parentis*, or, in other words, who is in charge of or responsible for the child.

A certificate of due attendance at a certified efficient school is as good as a certificate of proficiency under Standard IV. But a higher standard may now be required under a bye-law.

A certificate of due attendance is a certificate of 350 attendances in not more than two schools during each year for five years.

Attending school means effectual attendance, not the mere presence of the child at the school door.

You will not escape the infliction of a fine by sending your child to the school without the necessary pence.

A parent who is in impoverished circumstances may obtain relief from the guardians to enable him to pay the ordinary school-fees for his child.

A child who is beyond its parents' control may be brought before a magistrate and sent to an industrial school.

But the parent may have to contribute to its maintenance there.

The education of factory children has received the special attention of the law.

A child employed in a morning or afternoon "set" must attend school at least once on each week-day. But if employed on the alternate day system, then twice a day on the days preceding the day of employment.

Every occupier of a factory or workshop must obtain from the school teacher weekly a certificate of each child's attendance.

And until the child has made up any deficiency of school attendance the occupier may not employ such child.

Upon the application of an authority of a recognised school the occupier is bound to pay a weekly sum not exceeding threepence towards its schooling.

Or not exceeding one-twelfth of the child's wages.

The occupier may deduct such sum from the wages of the child.

When is a child not a "child"?

When it is aged thirteen and has obtained a certificate of a certain standard, or has completed a certain amount of school-attendance. It is then deemed to be a "young person."