



OUR LIFE IN A FLAT.

It is more than a year ago since I said good-bye to Uncle Philip and Aunt Jane and came to London to take care of my sister Sarah till her husband should come back from the West of Africa, where his regiment is stationed. We were not very comfortable in furnished lodgings, and one day, when I had found the servant black-leading Sarah's new boots outside the drawing-room door, I made up my mind that this was the last straw, and that I could bear such a life no longer.

Sarah had got a headache, so I left her asleep on the sofa and went out, determined to find some other refuge for our heads. We might take a small house (perhaps Uncle Philip would lend us some furniture), or—like a flash of inspiration—it occurred to me that a flat would be the very place for two ladies who only desired to live economically and quietly and were not particular as to the size of their habitation. So I went to an agent and he sent me at once to Peterborough Dwellings, which he said were genteel residences, without being too fashionable. To tell the truth, as the cab drove up to the dwellings I felt certain that Sarah would say that they looked like workhouses or lunatic asylums. By-and-by, however, when I had talked to a pleasant gentleman in a cheerful office for five minutes, and had seen a ground-plan, beautified with stretches of trees that were to be planted next year, I recollected that you live inside your house, and not over the way, and prepared my mind to be enchanted with the suite of apartments which was to let. We went upstairs—a great many stairs—to the third floor, and I saw the flat. It had six rooms, some small, some very small. It had a street-door and a letter-box. The drawing-room window looked out upon



MAKING THE PUDDING.

chimney-pots, as did all the others. It was light; it was comparatively cheap; it would be a home of our own, free from landladies! I lost my heart to the flat there and then, and I decided to take it on a short lease, provided that the references were satisfactory. This condition I flung in as an afterthought, remembering Uncle Philip's warning that I was to look before leaping.

When I got home and told Sarah what I had done, she threw her arm round my neck, and then clapped her hands with delight. "You dear, sensitive little thing!" she said; "I don't mind telling you now, Annie, that I believe another fortnight of this stuffy old lodging would be the death of me!"

After this, it was clear that we must set about furnishing, and move into our flat as soon as possible. "We can pic-nic, you know," Sarah said, "just till we get things straight; as long as we have a bed, and a few tables and chairs, it will be all right."

A week later saw us arrive at the flat, accompanied by Mrs. Tumber, an elderly charwoman, highly recommended by our late landlady. It took us nearly a month to arrange things to our mind, and long before that time we were grievously wearied of Mrs. Tumber. She was a thoroughly plain cook, and a hard worker in her way, but then it was such a casual and uncertain way. For instance, she had a rooted antipathy to cleaning paint or fenders, but the day I stained and varnished the drawing-room floor, she insisted upon polishing the stove with bath brick, and while I had gone to unpack the books, she "did round" the wainscot with a fluffly flannel, thereby ruining her apron and my handiwork for life. Yet Mrs. Tumber had strong conservative tendencies; she liked things done "as she had been accustomed." Hearthstone was one of her idols; she was never so happy as when on her knees with a pail of water and a large block of hearthstone (it would have been a real kindness to set her to work on Trafalgar Square), and as there were no steps at the flat, she was forced to devote her energies to the kitchen hearth, which by the time she left us was an inch and a-half higher than the boards—for she scorned to remove the traces of yesterday's labour. Her plan of cooking was comparatively simple. She liked "a roast to be a roast, and a biled a biled;" nevertheless, there was a third course open to her, against which (after one trial) we resolutely set our faces: "Get a onion, mum, and make a stew!"

Doubtless in the sanctity of home, Mrs. Tumber must have found some way of rectifying her mistakes, for she always thankfully carried away with her the tough mutton and blackened steaks that we could not eat, screwing them into unsightly bundles that she kept hidden under her shawl. She grew so amiable in the evening after the work was done, that it was quite difficult to get rid of her. Then, she made up for it by coming exceedingly late the next morning, and relating such ghastly tales concerning the illnesses of her husband, and all her sons and daughters, that Sarah's kind heart was wrung, and on the whole we found Mrs. Tumber a very expensive luxury.

Uncle Philip was deeply interested to hear of our new home; he sent us a cartload of furniture, and proposed that he and Aunt Jane should pay us a visit at the end of the month. We resolved that by that time everything should be in spick and span order. We were beginning to be proud of our flat; the drawing-room looked very pretty already, with its new carpet and curtains, and the kitchen was really like a room in a doll's house. It had a little kitchener, and an oven, and a larder (full in the glare of the western sun), and a dresser, and a dust-shoot, that communicated with the dustholes many feet below.

It was delightful to hear the cinders rattle through the shaft, or to throw a piece of firewood down as if you were fathoming the depths of a well, and hear it bounce when it got to the bottom. But it was not quite so amusing when (in the stillness of the night) the people overhead sent their broken bottles and crockery down with a crash. We got accustomed to the noise after a time, as we did to the parrot that whistled above and the dog that barked below us, but our visitors never could. However, I would rather tell you about our presents first. Uncle Philip had a large, rambling house, and in the fondness of his heart he sent us all the furniture out of one of the spare rooms and a great many cooking utensils. Alas! what were we to do with a four-post bedstead that was seven feet long by six broad, a kitchen-table that reached from the window to the dresser (so that Mrs. Tumber must either crawl under or jump over it twenty times a day), a plate-warmer that was wider than the stove, and a mahogany hanging cupboard that was too high for the doors, and had to stand, like a sentry-box, in the passage.

"It is quite certain," said Sarah, who always had so many ideas, "that they cannot stay here."

"No, I'm afraid not."
"And it's still more certain that Uncle Philip's feelings mustn't be hurt."

"Oh, no!" I cried; "most decidedly not."

"We might," continued Sarah, "saw the table up for firewood, or have the things stored in the drawing-room and always sit in the kitchen ourselves, but I don't really think that it would be wise. Suppose we send them to a warehouse?"

"The very best plan possible," I said, eagerly, and sat down to write a note. The next day the man came and took kind Uncle Philip's presents away with him. It was rather a costly business, as we had had to pay for bringing them up stairs, but the flat looked so nice and roomy without them that we didn't mind.

It was a great comfort to see how much stronger Sarah was getting. She bustled about all day long, arranging and rearranging the tables and chairs, and she never complained of being tired. She had a happy letter from Jack, too, saying that he was sending her home a parrot by a friend, Tom Leigh.

"We shan't have to warehouse that, I hope, or to banish Tom Leigh," said Sarah; and she put away her letter, and hummed a little tune, and said she was sure that the air of the flat agreed with her. She felt so well that she would go into the kitchen and make a pudding.

We had dined early Mrs. Tumber had left us; there was cold meat for supper. A wholesome plain plum-pudding would be the very thing we could both fancy.

I had promised to spend the afternoon with a friend, so I left Sarah (in a huge brown-holland apron) quite happy with the cookery-book, the scales, and the whole contents of the store cupboard at her disposal. On my return I found the table laid and Sarah in the highest of spirits.

"I have made the most beautiful pudding," she said, "and used all Aunt Jane's new-laid eggs. I did just as the cook said, and after I had boiled it for two hours, I hung it up in the larder and went for a walk. Cooking is really very easy, if you put your mind to it."

"Are we to have cold pudding?" I asked.

"Oh no, dear! I put it back in the saucepan directly I came in, and made up a splendid fire. Since then I have had a nice rest over my book."

We enjoyed our cosy little meal, and when the time came for the pudding to appear I

went with Sarah to see the final triumph of her skill.

"There's rather a curious smell, isn't there, darling?" she asked, a little anxiously.

"Never mind," I said, cheerfully, "let's dish it up."

Sarah took the lid off the saucepan, and immediately a thick smoke flew all over the kitchen, accompanied by a whiff of frizzled suet, which I feel unable to describe accurately.

"The horrid pudding has stuck to the saucepan and got burnt to a cinder," gasped poor Sarah.

"Wasn't there any water in the saucepan?" I inquired, with my handkerchief to my nose.

"It was quite full when I began to boil it," replied Sarah, laying an unsightly mass on the clean kitchen table, "and I never thought that it would boil away, and of course it did. Only look at the nice new cloth!"

I did look, and as I met Sarah's appealing glance I sank into the first chair and laughed till even she began to see the comic side of the question. We cut (what should have been) the pudding in two, and quite in the middle was a tiny place that had escaped destruction, enough to show us how good it would have been if the stupid cookery-book had given clearer directions.

"I'll write one myself," exclaimed Sarah, indignantly, "with a preface for idiots, and we shall see if the sale is not something enormous."

Our troubles were not yet over. What would Mrs. Tumber say, and how should we get rid of the pudding before she arrived to-morrow morning? It was against our principles to put anything of the kind down the dust-shoot, though we were positive that our charwoman had no such scruples; indeed, it was the delight of that large-minded female to make it a receptacle for cabbage-stalks and potato-peelings, and even, on one occasion, hot cinders, which, smouldering in the cellar, caused so much alarm in the lower flats that we were obliged to pay the porter five shillings to bring pails of water to extinguish the smoke. After much consultation we determined upon a bold scheme. It was now past 10 o'clock, and the street was comparatively deserted; like a couple of conspirators, we put out the lights, opened the window, and with quaking hearts hurled the pudding across the road. Then we burnt pastilles till a quarter to twelve, but the fragrance of Sarah's first failure remained in the flat for some hours longer.

One of Sarah's chief pleasures during our first few weeks at Peterborough Dwellings was the street door; it was something so new and gratifying to her, on hearing the ting-ting, of the bell, to fling down her book and run to answer the door. I never thoroughly sympathised with this taste, and after a time Sarah began to say that she thought a great many people must come up the stairs without any particular object in doing so, except, perhaps, to pull our bell. In the morning, besides the regular tradespeople, two or three boys with baskets would ring and inquire for somebody whose names we had never even heard of! For instance, it did annoy me when on answering a most peremptory summons, a very small boy (the smaller the boy the louder the ring) pushed a piece of gravy beef into my hands, and said "Bodgers." I suppose I wasted ten minutes arguing with him, and trying to convince him that he had come to the wrong flat. He went away at last, deeply injured, and I heard him ringing at every bell on his way downstairs.

In the afternoon we had callers of a better class, men in frock coats, with note books and pencils, who would be glad to know if we required fourteen tons of the best coal at a

reduced price; if we were contemplating laying in a stock of old port; or if they might be allowed to write us down for a copy of a new illustrated almanack, much patronised by the nobility and aristocracy. I just mention these little occurrences to show that though we were so happy in our flat it had its drawbacks. But the greatest drawback of all was the existence of a highly musical family immediately below us. They were remarkable people, possessing great individuality of character (or else, as Sarah said, they wouldn't have been living in our dwellings), which found vent in an enthusiastic love for music. One member of the family sang, a second played waltzes, and a third performed popular melodies on the piano, mostly with one finger. It is evident that the architect who designed the dwellings never meant to live in one of them himself, or else he would have taken some precautions for deadening the sound. Our neighbours' piano had a full, mellow tone, which penetrated the flooring, the carpet, and increasing in volume as it ascended, filled our drawing-room with vibrations. On one occasion, even Sarah's stout temper failed her; somebody below was rendering the "Holly Bush Polka," for the third time, when a piano organ in the street struck up "Nancy Lee." I put my fingers in my ears; never in my life had I heard so horrible a noise. Sarah rushed to the writing table, and snatching up a pen, began a furious letter of remonstrance to the landlord, threatening to leave the dwellings immediately unless this intolerable nuisance were put a stop to. However, as we had no stamps, we could not post the letter that night, and by the next morning we had become more tolerant in our views. Naturally, the poor things must practise, and it would be a great pity for us to leave the flat just as it was beginning to look so pretty. So Sarah wrote a polite note to the lady below us, instead of an angry one to the landlord; after that, the practising was conducted in a more rational style.

At last Aunt Jane wrote to say that, as Uncle Philip had business in London, she should avail herself of the opportunity and pay us a visit in our new abode. We were very busy that morning, arranging flowers and hanging pictures. Even Mrs. Tumber rose to the occasion; she anticipated Sarah's most cherished wish by proposing that we should have muffins for tea, and she swept the drawing-room carpet for upwards of half an hour (with closed windows) in order that the dust "might lay" before the arrival of our visitors. Uncle Philip came in, all smiles and friendliness, following Aunt Jane, who looked disappointed, as if she had expected to find that a flat had no roof, or that it was built after the fashion of an Esquimaux hut.

"Nice quarters you have got, girls!" cried Uncle Philip, rubbing his hands. "A little close, perhaps, after the country, eh?"

"Not at all, Uncle Philip," I exclaimed, indignantly.

"No? Well, perhaps not. I'm glad you're satisfied, Annie."

Sarah explained that as we had windows on either side of the passage, it was absolutely impossible that the flat *could* be close; on the contrary, it was always easy to get a thorough draught. To prove this the more clearly, she threw up the windows and opened the doors till Aunt Jane shivered, the fire smoked, and Uncle Philip declared that he was quite convinced. Then we walked round the premises in a procession, Uncle Philip admiring everything he saw, and Aunt Jane bent upon opening all the cupboards and cross-questioning Mrs. Tumber on the subject of her own domestic arrangements. As ill-luck would have it, just as Mrs. Tumber had begun an account of her husband's last attack, the tenant above chose that very moment to throw several soda-water bottles and an empty

sardine tin down the dust-shoot. They certainly did make a considerable clatter. Aunt Jane shrieked, and, as her nerves are not very strong, it really was a matter of difficulty to convince her that there was no immediate danger of the kitchen-wall falling in, or the chimney-pot being blown down upon our heads. At length we went back to the drawing-room, and had tea.

"And do you never find, my dear," said Aunt Jane, daintily helping herself to a muffin as her nerves began to recover their tone, "do you never find that the view is a trifle monotonous, in consequence of the windows all being on the same story?"

No, we had never thought about it.

"And there is one more question I must ask, at the risk of being tedious."

"Not at all, Aunt Jane," said Sarah, bent upon being very polite.

"In case of fire now, what would you do?"

"The staircase is fireproof," said Sarah, beginning to look a little mischievous, "and I hope we should get down in good time, especially if we held wet sponges to our faces."

But Aunt Jane was not satisfied yet. She shook her head solemnly. "If the staircase should fall a prey to the flames, my dear Sarah, or you failed to hear the alarm of fire?"

"Then I expect we should be burnt in our beds," said Sarah, flippantly; and Aunt Jane, who never can forgive a joke, was inexpressibly shocked. She sat bolt upright on the edge of her chair during the rest of the visit, refused all invitations to join in the conversation, and took Uncle Philip away to the station an hour earlier than was necessary. After that, we had a great many more visitors, all curious to find out how we liked our original way of housekeeping, and to know whether we meant to stay on at the flat. Of course we did; we had experienced all the inconveniences long ago, and had just begun to realise how pleasant it was to be thoroughly independent. Very soon Mrs. Tumber left us with a large bundle, and double wages, hoping that we should keep our health, and remember her, if we, at any time, should happen to have an old pair of boots to spare. She was succeeded by a nice little maid, and peace and cleanliness reigned in our flat.

By-and-by, Tom Leigh called, bringing the parcel from the West Coast and news of Jack. He was amazed and delighted to find Sarah so well and in such good spirits. They were great friends, and when he had seen her last she had been so terribly weak and ill that he had hardly thought that she could get well again. He did not tell me all this at first, but afterwards when we had seen a good deal of him, for he liked the flat so much that he came every day, and was quicker at opening the door than even Sarah herself! People learn to be so handy in the colonies, Tom says; "so they do in flats," but he would like me to have a little experience of colonial life too, so, as he has got an appointment in Canada which will keep him there some months, we are going out directly after our marriage. Jack will be home by that time, and he and Sarah mean to keep on the flat, at least till we come home again.

THE PRINCESS LOUISE HOME.

BY ANNE BEALE.

AS the readers of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER are still so kindly interested in the Princess Louise Home as to send, from time to time, gifts of money and work, we are again permitted to give them a few details. In the first place, another benevolent lady has volunteered to maintain a girl for four years in the Home—possibly for a longer period—and the writer

has once more had the great satisfaction of nominating her. She has come to replace our first G.O.P. girl, and, strange to say, both have the same surname. We have, therefore, still our half-dozen. The first, placed in the Home through the instrumentality of this magazine, is now in service, and she has gone to the kind friend who rescued her, a feeble child, from a doubtful situation. She has done extremely well, both in conduct and health, and we may all be proud of our eldest born.

In the second place, we are requested by the secretary, Mr. Gillham, to state that this is the year of the golden wedding of the home—or its inmates, which?—since homes are scarcely marriageable. At any rate, it has been in existence fifty years, and certain ceremonials are to take place. Presents are, of course, *de rigueur*; but, contrary to custom on such occasions, all that are given will be sold for the benefit of the children. Another grand bazaar! which "our girls" are again asked to aid by deft and nimble fingers. Details are not as yet forthcoming, but we will give them if space is allowed to us by our conscientious editor.

In the third and last place, the girls have had a singularly bright and happy Christmas and New Year, thanks to the ladies' committee and other friends of the institution. They had a Christmas-tree of unusually large dimensions, well hung with tapers and presents. The committee of the Reformatory and Refuge Union provided a magic lantern. Our old friends from Edmonton gave them a concert; prizes for good conduct, both in the Home and at service, were distributed; and our special G.O.P. girls received a book each, the present of friends interested equally in the success of the Home and the paper. In addition to all this, on Christmas morning Santa Claus presented each girl with a pair of new cuffs, a handkerchief, a letter, and a Christmas card, to say nothing of brand new dresses wherein to walk to church. Had they not reason to sing with the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men"? and, being well taught to reverence that Saviour whose birth they commemorated, they doubtless did sing with thankful hearts.

We pass over the good cheer that awaited them on their return to Woodhouse, and the abundant dessert provided by the friends who had placed them in the Home, lest we should outstep the space allotted for our exercise; but we venture to add a few words written by their indefatigable secretary concerning the kindness of friends. "The loving spirits who had been moved to do all this could not but realise that Providence had entrusted to their hands the dispensation of a very bright epoch in the lives of these young girls, who have now returned to the more serious duties of life, several of them going to service with the full assurance that they carry with them the prayers and good wishes of all those they leave behind."

We have again to thank our staunch friend Veronica for another parcel, Mrs. Holland for twenty woollen scarfs, Mrs. Cronin for undergarments, friends at Plymouth for calico and flannel, and in Abbey-road for work, Lady Greenwell for a parcel, Miss Blair a case, and Miss C. Spencer (of Bombay) for an embroidered Indian table-cover, a first instalment for our next bazaar. We would also gratefully acknowledge the following donations—Elsie Forsyth, Switzerland, 19s. 9d.; A Farmer's Wife who remembers the Home in good Mr. Talbot's time, £1; Collected by Miss Ella Skinner, £1 10s.; per Editor of "G.O.P.," 3s.; Mrs. Pranker, per Miss Anne Beale, 10s. 6d.; Miss Clark, 2s. 6d.

The office of the Princess Louise Home is still 32, Sackville-street, Piccadilly, London, W., and Mr. Gillham and Miss Tidd continue to work there.