A LETTER FROM A KITCHEN.

[To the Editor of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER.]

SIR,—I take the liberty of writing you these few lines to tell you how much my fellow-servant, Sarah, and I, and that your paper is. I was always fond of reading, from a child, and, mother used to make rare fun of me, and say she believed I would sit with a book written in French in my hands so that not be reading at all; but I don’t know that I ever read anything I liked so much as THE GIRL’S OWN PAPER, for there’s a bit of all sorts in it—something to make you laugh, as well as something to teach you; but there’s some of the writings in it that I thought I’d like to say a word about, in case there was any readers might be placed like myself.

You must know that I am a general servant, only there’s a girl of sixteen kept too, being rather more work than one can do properly, as it is a large house, and master and mistress very particular, not what they are good people, and kind to us girls in many ways that some would never think of.

Well, as I was saying about THE GIRL’S OWN PAPER, there’s many pieces in it are very nice to read, and useful, no doubt, to the ladies as have not got to work all day, but that poor folks might pass by, with—Oh, that isn’t suited for the likes of us; however could we do all that’s written down here?

That’s what I thought when mistress made me present of the first few numbers, and advised me to take it in regular.

There are some pieces written, I should say, by a medical gentleman, to tell you how to improve your appearance, and all by fair means; not any of those nasty messes for the complexion as you see advertised. I could not help smiling when I saw those rules for making your look wealthy and bright; and I remember saying to the other girl, “Ah, Sarah, we haven’t time to be thinking about our complexion.” But then I thought to myself, why shouldn’t we try to look nice as well as am as have been born young ladies; so said I to Sarah, “I’ll just see what the gentleman has to say about it.”

With that I took the book up again and read all about taking care of your hair. Certainly it would not be right nor yet reasonable for such as me to take new things in the book for most long hair; and with us we always have the best yellow soap, or else the soft soap, which is better to my thinking, and I don’t know but what that is as good as the ones when all’s said and done. At any rate, since I began to wash my hair thoroughly with it for a little while, and give it a good brush every night, no one would believe the difference. Even mistress said once, “Why, Jane, how nice and bright your hair do look now; quite different from the dirty-looking wig you used to have.”

I felt pleased at that; I cared very much for mistress don’t often pass a remark about our appearance, unless she thinks we are getting too fine, and then it isn’t praise she gives us. Then it seems you can’t be healthy without having a bath every morning, at least. It says so times upon times in those papers I’m speaking about. If any body has a need to be strong and well, certainly it’s servants, for if they fall ill, whatever is to become of them?

But I was in a place where the servants could have a bath, neither night nor morning, and what with the desperate hurry in the morning, and too tired to do anything at nights, most girls aren’t so particular as they might be about washing themselves regular.

But though we can’t have a regular bath like the paper says we ought to, there’s not much difficulty about having a thorough wash all over once a week. Sarah and me share the same bedroom, and how we manage this. On bath night, as we call it, I get a can of hot water and go to bed half an hour earlier than usual, which mistress has no objections to, as, if anything is wanted, there is Sarah to attend to it; and on her bath night she does the same, and I attend to her work, for I have persuaded her into following the same. And certainly it’s time well spent, for I feel a different girl since I began, and Sarah’s mother says she shall be about keeping her children a bit tidier, for Sarah puts them all to shame when she goes home on a visit.

Then there are all the papers about cooking, and many’s the hint I have taken from them. I can call to mind several things I have tried to do, such as I read about us English cooks being wasteful when compared with foreigners, which I’ve always understood comes from soap; but certainly they make use of grease and fat even saving the water meat has been boiled in, I must say it has brought down the butcher’s book a bit, and many’s the time I have seen to table, made, as you may say, out of nothing, and mistress soon noticed them, and likewise the change in the butcher’s book, and when I told her the reason pleased. “If that’s the case, Jane,” says she, “I shall have to raise your wages, or you will be wanting to leave us, there’s a grand cook’s place now you’re getting such a first-rate one, and so economical too.”

It says in one place that your meat ought never to be frozen, but always hung up. But suppose your larder hasn’t any hooks in it, and the larder not over good nor

over large, which is the case with ours. That stopped me at the first, but then I thought to myself, “If mistres won’t bring a shilling or two if it keeps the meat better,” and I have a dozen large and some small iron hooks, and nailed them in the larder walls, and sure enough there were my meat hooks, as good as if the first carpenter in the land had made them.

I must not forget the papers about needlework, those which on cutting out and making dresses have been most useful to me, and others too, no doubt, for it is a shame to pay three shillings or more for making a plain print, when anyone can make it themselves by following what it says in the book. But most of all, it has an hour or two to themselves of an evening. I saved up the old newspapers that came downstairs, and gummed them together, and though I did not get on so very well at first, I managed at last to cut out a pretty fair pattern, taking the measures from an old dress, and kept it by me, so I can always cut out a dress now without any trouble about the pattern.

There are some beautiful pictures of what might be termed fancy darning, and very well done; too, as, considering the table linen; also one, more proper for knitted things, that I use when I have time for mistress’s stockings, and very nice it is, for when the hole was; but in general it is the table linen I use the directions for, for you can even copy the pattern of the damask. If you go by what they certainly do.

If you will please excuse me being so long-winded, as the saying is, there is one more thing I should wish to tell you about. There was a paper in the paper about the bedroom look nice, though some might say the writer did not mean them for such as us. Perhaps not; but I dare say she will be all the better pleased to think something has been put out by one, at least. Most girls in service don’t care what their rooms are like, so long as there is a bed and a washstand, and just room to turn round; but after I read that piece up to Sarah one evening, we thought we should like to make ours more comfortable than at present. Of course I asked mistress if she would object to having a shelf or two, and when she took it in, it fell in my mind, and what had put me up to it, she said quite pleasantly, “Oh, certainly, anything in reason; tell me what you want, and I will have it in a day or two.”

With that Sarah and I talked it over, and decided to have a drawer covered with American cloth by the washstand, which is terrible crowded, what with a water-bottle and soap dish, and one thing and another, and in a corner we shall have a shelf with a cabinet hanging from it for a cupboard to keep our dresses in, just like the young ladies in the story did. Then under the bed we have a wooden box where we keep our best bonnets and boots such like and we thought it might come to quite handsome, and keep it in the room instead of under the bed, and it will make another seat, which at present we have only one chair, and we are going to stuff the top with paper torn small and make it like a cushion.

With what one thing and another the paper has been very useful to me, though a poor girl, and may you go on as interesting as you have begun is the sincere wish of

I remain, your obedient servant,

JANE COOPER.

[The Editor has, with Jane Cooper’s permission, inserted the above interesting letter, and he hopes that the perusal of it will prove of benefit to many of his readers.]