

Smoke-blackened walls, greasy floor, ashes up to the grate, and a litter of odds and ends for which no special places had ever been found, met the eye. The supper-plates of the night before mingled with the crockery used by her husband at his comfortable breakfast, and all were unwashed.

In fact, Ann Jackson's home, never tidy, was always worse than common on what she called her washing day, though the laundry work might not be begun. It was an article of faith with Ann that muddle and the family washing must go together. Yet, as the woman looked at Susan and her surroundings a dim notion came into her mind that her neighbour at least could separate needful work from needless muddle, though she had never done it in her life.

"Law, Susan!" she said, "how straight your house does look. I can't think where you put things. Our house is bigger, but I never have a bit of room to put a thing down. I want a lot of new pots and pans, but if anybody made me a present of 'em I shouldn't know what to do with 'em. What bits of holes poor folks like us have to spend our lives in, to be sure!"

Susan well knew that she had more furniture and less room than her neighbour, but she had contrived a place for each article; and putting it away the moment it was out of use, she kept an air of neatness and comfort in what Ann called "a poor hole of a cottage."

To be sure she was put to shifts and contrivances to keep food and milk in the summer time, for the only closet in the house, though called a pantry, was too near the fire to be of use for storing eatables. Though meant to hold crockery, cooking utensils, and provisions, the place was so small that if Susan had not been very careful in her movements, she would have swept half the shelves of their contents in turning round.

"I've had a nice bit of fresh meat spoiled for want of a keeping place," said Anne, after a moment's pause.

"It is hard to keep it sweet this close weather," replied Susan. "I've had to contrive something for myself, and it answers pretty well. Come and look at it."

She wiped her hands, and led the way to the farther parlour, in which were two beds, though only one was in use now the eldest sons were absent.

"The room does not look quite straight, for I always leave the beds

open and the clothes spread to air before I make them up. It isn't wholesome to cover them up directly. I can show you my pantry though," said Susan.

Stooping down, she drew from under the unused bed two large shallow puncheons, each of which had a wooden cover pierced with small holes. In these were arranged the milk, with a plate over it, on which was the butter. Bread, meat, and other perishable articles of food were neatly arranged in the two vessels.

"You see," said Susan, "the floors are brick, and always cold. Andrew made these covers out of some pieces of wood the master gave him. He pierced the holes, painted the covers white, and we had two places to keep food in. The air gets through the holes, but no dust can get in, because I throw clean white cloths over all."

Ann shook her head as if she did not approve. "I don't know that I like putting eatables in a place where folks sleep," she said.

"No more do I; but as I have no choice I do the best I can, and I keep the place sweet and clean. I often wish that when gentlefolks build cottages for poor folks they would just think what is wanted for decency and health. I would ask no more than that."

"*They think!*" Ann replied, with almost a shriek. "They think nowt about such as us so long as they get all they want for themselves."

"I hardly think that. Some don't know how we are put about in these old places, or they would do something. They don't build such now, and when an old thatched place is pulled down they put up a nice brick and slated one instead."

"Not always big enough," persisted Ann. "I know some new ones with kitchen and parlour downstairs, and two little bedrooms above them. All right they are for a young couple to start in, or an old one to finish in, after the children are gone to service. But look at my nevvys, for instance. His cottage was built for him when he got married by as good a master as ever stepped. It was nice enough for the first years, but now he has six little children just one above another. Father, mother, and baby have a bedroom, and the five older children, two boys and three girls, are packed somehow in the other."