

HOUSEKEEPING IN LONDON.

By A GIRL-PROFESSIONAL.

PART II.

NEW ROOMS.

It was New Year, a day in January which was the beginning of a quite new life. I remember that it was a mild day, so mild and so green and promising, it seemed as though spring was already come. I turned away from our garden gate feeling confident that good fortune lay before me, and the peaceful life of the past two years slipped into the background of my life, to be regained never.

My hand was fairly set to the plough now, there could only be one object in view, and to that every energy must bend, no looking back or regretting could avail, however difficult the task might prove to be.

The carrier had taken quite a load of luggage. I was to claim it at the railway station, and like an emigrant I was taking my bed and its furnishings along with me, likewise many household stores of linen, china, silver, and the less valuable, but equally necessary articles that adorn a kitchen shelf. I fear those who were left behind missed me considerably after I had cleared off!

But when my thirteen pieces of luggage were deposited in the middle of the dining-room floor of that desirable but sadly empty residence, and I stood surveying them and the dreary place they were to fill, how very forlorn they looked. However, this was the time for putting on one's rose-coloured spectacles, and fortunately I was able to put them on.

My bachelor-girl put her key in the door and came in with a brisk step even as I stood pondering on my next move.

"Isn't it jolly," she said, "to think this is our house? I feel so proud every time I come in, and do you see I've bought a door-mat?"

So she had, a miserable little bit of a thing that went slipping and sliding along the floor as if protesting against its utter loneliness. I pointed to the door-mat which was in company with various other trifles of a like kind, and my best umbrella, but she was not snubbed.

"Come upstairs and I'll light a fire, then we'll fix up your bed and get supper." So upstairs we went, each carrying as much of the luggage as we could. She was occupying the front room at the very top, and rejoicing in its space and airiness which as yet there was nothing to hinder.

"There's ever such a view from these windows," she went on, "I can see the Surrey hills on a fine day, and always see the sun rise."

I peered out, seeing nothing but blackness and twinkling gas lamps, and shivered. The crackling of the fire and the candle-light was more welcome than the finest view just then. These revealed too that a little table was ready prepared with a cloth and some tea-cups, and a kettle was put on the oil-stove close by. It was not so very forlorn after all.

When our supper was eaten and the fire had burnt cosily we held a review of troops as it were.

We had £50 at our back by Uncle B.'s kindness; I had a £5 note in hand and as much again in the savings bank, and she had her weekly salary of 30s. Twelve pounds of our fund was already spent in paying a lawyer's fee and in the purchase of a carpet, a bed and mattress, some chairs and a couple of little tables for the room in which we sat; and I had previously laid down £1 for some useful pieces of furniture left us by the late tenant. We took comfort in thinking how much that £1 had done; in reality we owed the good man a big debt of gratitude, for he

must have felt for our position and done his utmost to help us, covertly. Who ever heard of twenty shillings purchasing all the furniture for a servant's bedroom, a large-sized chest of drawers besides, of excellent quality and nearly new; two mahogany swing locking-glasses (one very large), three baths, two bedroom chairs, a large square stained table, a fender and odd useful articles besides? Every one of these, however, became of distinct value now.

We could not hope to furnish much of the house now out of our slender store, therefore we must decide how many rooms we could possibly let unfurnished. The drawing-room floor with its two spacious rooms was settled without much deliberation, also the floor above it, with rooms almost as large and a box-room between. We would keep the ground floor and this one at the top, which had three rooms, for our own use, or rather as my plan was to provide a late dinner for our tenants with ourselves, we should require the dining-room for this purpose, of course. The back room on the ground floor we did not absolutely want, but it was put out of the calculation as not being lettable at all.

Then we had the basement, which, when examined by daylight, seemed appallingly extensive, and yet, if I was to provide board, I must retain the kitchen, and indeed I had visions of possibilities for the future which made me loth to think of letting this roomy kitchen. Ought it not to become the "house-place," which I had always claimed a kitchen should be.

It took up the basement at the back of the house, and a scullery with stone floor, sink, etc., was between it and the steps which led up to a small square garden. Level with these steps was a little larder which would delight any housewifely soul. Between the kitchen and the housekeeper's room was a pantry with slate shelves, then came a room into which the morning sun shone full and bright, revealing its capabilities to the full. One side was taken up by cupboards sunk into the walls, well fitted with shelves above and box-room below; on another side stood a fine linen press in polished wood that had been counted among the fixtures which we had to pay for out of our capital. The fireplace here was a corner one, and the window took up another side leaving only one blank wall. In the middle of this room stood the large table before mentioned. It was a capital table, stained legs, its top covered with American cloth, and it was fitted with two large drawers. Very little more furniture would be needed to make this place a cosy sitting-room, after we had remedied its one defect—a disagreeable paper, the only one in the house. But this defect was one that came within the compass of our own remedial powers.

We dubbed this the "breakfast-room" of our mansion; doubtless it would prove to have other purposes to fill as time went on, but that would distinguish it sufficiently well. A wine-cellar and a large coal-cellar opening into the area, which latter had a nice flight of steps and gateway into the street, made up the extent of the basement. After every examination we always came to the satisfactory conclusion that we had secured a bargain; the house was a good house, solidly well-built, well-drained, and well fitted in every way. Its only drawback was the want of a bathroom, but the range was not fitted to supply the necessary water; however, we had no explosions to fear on this account.

A good deal of whitewashing and cleaning

must be done, and that without delay, as the time must not be allowed to go by leaving us unsettled. We were fortunate in meeting with a contractor who was moderate with estimates and reliable, he was himself a young man starting in business and desirous of getting a good reputation. As he undertook plumbing as well as decorating, he ended by becoming our general factotum, although after a couple of years of paying even his small bills we learnt to do much of his work ourselves. It had been very easy to call in Mr. Clay when a leakage broke out or a lock refused to work, but when the half-crowns and three-and-sixpences had to be paid it was another matter. However, he and his men were not long in giving us clean ceilings and walls in these first weeks, and by the time February was in we were clean and trim throughout. I myself worked steadily every day, washing paint and cleaning rooms, and in the evening the bachelor lent a hand at the same employment. Between us we repapered our breakfast-room with a pretty light paper, a "Knowles" remnant; it took us four evenings to do, and when not too closely examined looked very successful. It might not have taken so long, but we had cut the lengths off first, then found the pattern had to be matched, so much piecing was necessitated. All is well that ends well, however, and that sunny paper has given us continual satisfaction since. The frames of the window inside and the skirting board, mantelpieces, etc., I painted with light brown enamel; we bought some olive-green serge for a pair of long curtains and a cover for the table, as the carpet which was to come from the country home was olive-green also. These, with an easy chair, a camp chair, and four small light wood ones, made up the furniture of this apartment. Afterwards it was greatly added to by having my large writing-desk placed here, where it proved so useful, as when a few moments could be snatched from other duties I could come and sit down to writing or reading and yet keep a watch on "the pans," as we generically described our kitchen performing apparatus.

No tenant having yet appeared, as soon as the rough cleaning was through we inserted a tentative advertisement in the *Morning Post*. About eleven o'clock on the morning on which it appeared I was called to open the door to the first applicant, an elderly gentleman and his niece. These duly criticised the rooms upstairs and down, professing themselves very satisfied with everything, "and they would come again."

When they were gone there came a fashionable dame of imposing appearance who almost insisted on being taken in at once with a dog, a parrot, and a nephew to boot! While she was loudly urging her claims, another knock sounded and another lady entered, one who was a distinct contrast in appearance and manner to the second comer. This later applicant had one son, a young man of nineteen, and would require three rooms. She took my fancy and seemed suitable, but alas, the terms were too high. She appeared charmed with the plan I intended adopting with regard to meals, etc., and apparently was the very tenant for us, and went away sorrowfully to think the matter over. Others followed every day of that week, but none seemed better than the first applicant, and as he returned again and yet again, we felt drawn to a decision in his favour, the more so that he offered himself to draw up a written agreement between us, which, if we found it just, was to be signed, and a copy retained by both parties.