

A HUNDRED A-YEAR.

FROM THE PARISH MAGAZINE.

"I'm sure there's no satisfying some men," grumbled Mrs. Pratt. "To hear you talk one would think we had a hundred a-year, and I wasted half of it."

"Well," Mr. Pratt answered, "all I say is that Will Benson earns ten shillings a-week less than I do, and look at *his* home!"

Nothing vexes a woman more than to be told that her neighbor's house looks better than her own, and Mrs. Pratt's eyes sparkled angrily. "I'm not a fine lady," she replied. "I never was."

"No, nor never will be," said her husband, "and Marjorie Benson's not one neither, but she's a rare good wife, and I wish you would take a leaf out of her book. It's having a home like this that drives a man to drinking."

He slung his bag of tools over his shoulder and went off to his work, leaving his wife in an uncomfortable state of mind. Thriftless slattern as she was, she felt proud of her sober, respectable husband, and the idea of Jem taking to drink did not please her.

Certainly he had not grumbled without reason. The floor was unswept, the hearth strewn with ashes and litter, the dirty breakfast cups and dishes lay upon the window-sill; and when the tired man had walked in after a morning of hard work, he found his wife gossiping with her next door neighbor, while her potato-saucepan had boiled over and put out the fire. Of course, the potatoes were not cooked. Jem declared he could not wait for them, and grumbled over his bread and meat until Susanna remarked that she "wondered it didn't choke him."

Then he angrily asked whether a man earning good wages had not a right to expect a comfortable meal, and she retorted with the words related at the beginning of my story.

"Marjorie Benson, indeed!" she repeated, wrathfully. A stuck-up minx! I'll go in this very afternoon, and see if she's not in as great a mess as I am!"

Half an hour later she knocked at Mrs. Benson's back door.

"Come in!" cried Marjorie. "Oh, it's you, Mrs. Pratt. Sit down by the fire. Isn't it cold to-day?"

"You're warm enough in here," said her neighbor, casting a hasty glance around the kitchen as she sat down. How cosy it looked! The steel fender shone brightly in the firelight, and on the rug before it lay a sleek gray cat. A set of old-fashioned shelves were on the wall facing the fireplace, and upon them were arranged Marjorie's stock of plates and dishes, with the cups hanging along the edges of the shelves. Beneath them stood a little dresser, painted and covered with a red cloth, and at a table near the window stood Marjorie in a dark stuff gown, well protected by a large holland apron, made with bib and pockets, so that

it really was a becoming addition to her attire.

"What are you busy about?" inquired Mrs. Pratt. "Do you give your man meat to his tea?"

"No," replied Marjorie, "it's to-morrow's dinner. I'm making a stew, and it's better cooked the day before you want it."

Mrs. Pratt went on talking about other matters, but watched Marjorie carefully meanwhile. She had spread a newspaper on her table, and upon this stood a brown jar into which she was slicing vegetables. A couple of carrots, a turnip, a good-sized onion, half a dozen potatoes, a bit of parsley, a sprinkle of pepper and salt, a handful of flour; then she filled up the jar with cold water, and was opening the oven door when Mrs. Pratt inquired, "Don't you put any meat in?"

"Oh, yes!" and Marjorie removed the lid; "see, there's a bit of beef, about two pounds, and it makes a capital hot dinner, and lasts us two or three times. Will doesn't care for cold meat this weather."

"Do you give it him hot every day?"

"Yes. It costs no more if I'm careful."

The oven-door was shut. Marjorie put all her things tidily away, and, taking her knitting, sat down by the fire.

Mrs. Pratt thought of her own dirty room, and of Jem's comfortless mid-day meal, and then his last words crossed her mind again, "It's having a home like this that drives a man to drinking."

"Mrs. Benson," she said suddenly, "my man's been giving it me this dinner-time. I tell him we might have a hundred a-year to hear him talk, but he declares your Will gets less wages than he does, and you certainly do seem to get along better than we do."

"We have a hundred a-year," said Marjorie quietly.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mrs. Pratt. "Ah, it's easy making a house neat and pretty when there's money to do it with!"

"But you're better off than we are," continued Marjorie. Did you never reckon it up?"

"Reckon it up! What do you mean?"

"My Will earns two pounds a week, that's a hundred a year, taking off a fortnight for his holidays, and your husband gets more than that."

"He has two pound ten regular. But, dear me, Mrs. Benson, you don't mean it comes to all that! Why, I'm sure I've heard that Mr. Lake, the curate, only gets a hundred and fifty."

"Very likely," said Marjorie. "I never thought of it till just before I was married, and my mistress asked me what I was marrying on, and she told me what it came to, and showed me how comfortable working men might be if their wives took proper care of the money. You see we don't pay out much for rent, and we've no servants and no taxes, and we've the money coming in regularly every week, and that's an advantage which gentlefolk don't always get. I know that my mistress herself often had to pinch in little things that I can afford quite well; but she was a good, clever