



CRICKET.

By Forrestine C. Hooker.



THE house was in no way distinguishable from the blocks of other houses, with their brilliant red bricks and white marble trimmings, except for its immaculate steps, and feminine eyes read the invisible writing above the white door, "Cleanliness is next to godliness."

Years before, when Third street had an uninterrupted view of the Delaware River, an old sailing master, owning his three snug vessels, built the house, and lived with his wife and five daughters. Nothing, save his departure or return from a voyage, ever disturbed the peaceful monotony of the home, until nature demanded payment of the debt of life, and a few months later the widow, always dominated by her husband's will, meekly folded her hands and followed his example. After the parents were laid side by side in the family lot, the "girls" settled down to the same routine as before.

Though years passed by each gray-haired sister religiously referred to the others as "the girls," until it became a standing joke with later generations.

There had been one ripple to break the calm of their lives, after the death of their parents. Ripple? No, hurricane or tidal wave, rather, Anna, the oldest, had been engaged; and the five sisters had planned, whispered and fluttered over the event, while the fingers hemmed and stitched industriously on the hand-made trousseau.

Then came a belated message. The *Mary Ann* had been wrecked and all hands lost except one man, who told the story of Captain Joyce's unavailing heroism. Their little world sympathized a short time, praised the captain's bravery, then forgot; and at Anna's request the sisters packed the shimmering bridal dress away in lavender, to be worn on the day when death should reunite those it had separated.

After this they slipped back into the old rut, one unbroken by any jolt of the outside world. Kingdoms might fall, but the fact would only serve as a momentary topic of conversation, then be dismissed for the more engrossing subject of planting a new rose-bush or airing the feather-bed in the spare room. One by one five cats were introduced into the family circle, for "the girls" dreaded a mouse as much as a burglar.

Once in a while carriages would deposit stately grandfathers and their dames at the door, and tea would be served under the rose-arbor that faced the garden. That garden was the one luxury "the girls" allowed themselves, and the flowers seemed to realize the novelty of existing in their beauty amid the unlovely brick walls that scowled down on them; but, like petted children, the roses only tossed their heads and scattered their perfume more lavishly, as though in pure defiance.

Tea would be served in delicate, quaint cups, that were heirlooms, and had never been washed by any alien hand; crisp cakes, made from an old family recipe, would be handed about, reposing in a silver cake basket that had been "brought over" in the days when the naughty little colonies refused to be spanked by their irate mother. "Old silver is always a badge of gentility," remarked Adelaide, frequently, when polishing the silver set. "Anyone can buy modern silver, you know."

When tea was finished the guests would follow the sisters around the garden, and depart laden with fragrant souvenirs, leaving an atmosphere of colonial compliments hovering on the rose-perfumed air.

At rare intervals "the girls" would

attend a magic lantern exhibition given for the benefit of the church. On these occasions there would be a gentle commotion attendant on deciding if the weather would permit the best bonnet or second best, the third best being reserved for marketing days.

This momentous question being disposed of, and the old Paisley shawls draped about the prim little figures, they would carefully examine the bolts to doors and windows, then sally forth. After greeting a few friends, "the girls" would explain: "One cannot put old heads on young shoulders, my dear; and Adelaide does so enjoy going about!" blissfully forgetful of Adelaide's sixty years, for Adelaide had no gray hairs. Her brown wig, with its four little corkscrew curls dangling each side of her face, gave a decided air of frivolity to the youngest sister. The wig had

fearlessly at the world from beneath a mop of tangled, curly hair. Her clothes were of good material, but sadly the worse for wear, and one stocking shirked its responsibility shamelessly by refusing to cover the plump brown leg, though the other stocking heroically endeavored to do its duty in spite of gaping wounds. Adelaide looked at the child severely.

"Little girl, don't you know it is unpardonably rude to enter a room without knocking, especially when you are a stranger?"

The child smiled confidently at her and walked to a plethoric horse-hair chair, which she mounted after much wiggling. Her feet dangled some distance from the floor and the chair was slippery.

"I never knock anywheres," she announced. "I just go in."

The sisters gasped, but before they had recovered breath enough to speak,



"In an instant Adelaide and Mr. Burns were at her side."

been donned as a necessity after an illness while she was comparatively young, and, though years had elapsed, Adelaide had never varied from the original chestnut brown.

Adelaide was the keystone of the family. When she was absent lamps were used instead of gas, as no one else had the temerity to light the gas or turn it out. In fact, this concession to advancement had only been made after being seriously and prayerfully considered for five years.

When the nightly round of investigation began, Adelaide headed the procession armed with a poker, boldly peering into closets and under beds for the long expected burglar, while the other sisters grouped timorously near the door, afraid to advance, yet too loyal to flee.

The warm summer day was drawing to a close, and the front door had been left slightly ajar, for "the girls" were in the back sitting-room, from which they could see any possible intruder.

Suddenly there was a patter of feet, and before anyone could rise a child walked in and calmly surveyed them, then turned and inspected the room. She was about five years old, and one could guess she might be rather pretty if her face were ever resurrected from its accumulation of real estate. Her large, dark eyes looked

the child stiffened her back and slid from the chair.

"Haven't you got any chairs for little girls?" she demanded. "This one is slickery, and it sticks my legs."

"Little girls never come here without being invited," said Adelaide, in what she fondly imagined was an impressive tone. "I think you had better run home now, or your mother will be worried."

"Oh, no, she won't; not a bit," was the positive reply. "She's dead."

Anna moved her feet from a little round carpet-stool, saying, "See if this is better than the chair, dear."

The child obeyed with alacrity, and, after squirming around, discovered the stool moved on castors.

"It's awful com'fy," she declared.

"What is your name?" asked Emmaline, after a few seconds of silence, broken only by the squeaking protest of the castors.

"Cricket."

"Cricket—what?"

"Cricket nothing," answered the child, pausing in her gyrations; "just Cricket, when I'm good. Papa and mama didn't have any other name for me, but Miss Jessups she calls me a 'limb of Satan,' and when she says, 'E-liz-a-beth El-der Ar-ling-ton,' that way," with a comical attempt at a deep basso, "then I know she's just whopping mad."

A gleam of intelligence passed from face to face, for even in their seclusion they had heard of the advent of this little waif.

Her father had been an army officer, and after her mother's death he had kept the child with him. During his enforced absences on duty Cricket had been cared for by other army mothers, and tucked up with their own broods. The child had never missed her own mother, because every woman in the garrison mothered her, until Lieut. Arlington had been killed by Indians.

After an exchange of letters with a distant relative, who was grasping for the pitiful two dollars a month granted by our liberal government to children whose fathers have served it honorably till death, Cricket was shipped with a basket of food, and a tag on her neck consigned her to the tender mercies of the travelling public on her way to No.—South Third Street, Philadelphia.

Mrs. Jessup, the distant relative, accepted Cricket ungraciously, and considered her principal duty was collecting the pension promptly for her own benefit.

The first week after her arrival Cricket had climbed to the top of the highest tree on the street, and thrashed a boy older than herself, because he tried to kiss her. She scorned the girls after discovering they were afraid of horses, while she would fearlessly stroke each horse within reach of her arm. The other girls fled in disgust from the dirty-looking curs that congregated about Cricket; for the dogs all knew there was a piece of bread and molasses or a bit of cooky somewhere in Cricket's ragged apron. The social Gordian knot was cut when Cricket spoke of riding her own pony bareback, in Texas, when boys and girls united to label her as a worthy descendant of Ananias. The controversy that followed resulted in Cricket's grabbing two long braids of hair that hung temptingly from the head of her chief tormentor, and the astonished victim was dragged in state as efficaciously, if not as impressively, as a Roman captive. In the uproar that ensued the fond mammas appeared and clucked to their own precious little chicks, and bade them "keep away from the naughty, naughty girl who used to live among the Indians!"

Ostracism was a new experience for a child used to the freedom of a frontier garrison, where everyone was her friend, from Colonel Johnston down to Mrs. O'Rafferty the laundress, including Dobbin, the pony, and Tatters, the colonel's dog; and in her loneliness the open door had beckoned invitingly.

The child hitched the stool close to Emmaline's chair, watching curiously the little bobbin in her hands making tating. Leaning against the woman, Cricket addressed "the girls."

"Do you know, Miss Jessups don't like me very much," she confided, cheerfully. "She says I am a awful nuisance; and when I asked her what a awful nuisance is, she said it's something you think you want, and when you get it you don't want it and then I knew. It's just like when Jack Johnston got the whoopin'-cough. Mrs. Johnston said all children got it." Then, looking meditatively at "the girls," she added, "Did any of you ever get it? and without waiting for a reply she rattled on." Jack was awful proud because he had it and I didn't. Mrs. Johnston told me to keep away from Jack while he was coughing, and I wouldn't get it. I told Jack I wanted it, but he said I couldn't have it, and every time he coughed he ran away from me. So I pushed him into a cupboard and shut myself in with him and shook him till he coughed real hard, and then I said, 'Now, you give me that whoopin'-cough, Jack Johnston,' and I got it."