The Family Circle

THE PHILOSOPHICAL EARWIG

The earwig sat down on a broad lettuce leaf,
A philosopher grave was he,
And the point that he pondered (and pondered with grief),
Was the things that ought never to be.
'Oh, I can't understand the ways of the world,'
Was the soul of his constant complaint,
'For what is the use of a brush to a fox,
When he's never been taught how to paint?
And what is the sense of a pen to a pig,
When he can't write a line, I declare?
And, why should the stairs have a foot and no leg,
I really can't get over that.
Why is it the cricket will never play ball,
And the grasshopper don't brew its hops,
And why does the axe never ask to have bread,
Or potatoes along with its chops?
And why mayn't the dog sail the sea in his bark,
Or the elephant lock up his trunk,
Or the sun build a house with its beams?
And why does the door never eat up its jamb?
So wasteful to keep it, it seems!
And why does the turkey that's dead never smile,
When a merry thought's still in its breast?—
And why——' He stopped short; he'd been seized by a hen,
And nobody e'er heard the rest.

—Exchange.

THE UGLINESS OF ANNA MARIA

Anna Maria sat out on the back steps feeling blue, dreadfully blue. She felt that way most of the time.

For one thing, Jane had told her she was ugly, and that she always would be. Now, no girl likes to be ugly, and if she is, she does not like to be told so.

Another thing. Anna Maria was slow. If she tried to hurry she nearly always broke things, and if she took her time they generally burned.

Then, too, she was awkward. She was just thirteen, the very worst age for awkwardness, but she did not know that. She supposed all her life would be spent in knocking things off the tables, stepping on babies' toes, and falling over chairs.

But even that was not all. Jane was cross, not only to-day, but every day. Jane was Anna Maria's half-sister, with whom she lived.

Of course there was some excuse for Jane. She had four children of her own, all small, cross, and noisy. The family was poor and Jane had to work hard.

Still Anna Maria could not see that she had to be cross and snappish all the time. It seemed to her that things would go on about as well if she would once in a while quit nagging and speak civilly to a body. At least it could not be any worse, for things were in pretty bad shape in the little three-roomed house, everything scattered where it ought not to be. There was very seldom much chance for one to cross a room without stumbling over something out of place, and then one got yelled at.

She heard Luke come home. 'Where is Anna Maria?' he asked.

'Oh, out sulking somewhere, like she always is,' answered Jane. "I don't see what will become of that girl. She just doesn't know how to do anything and can't learn. She let the teakettle go dry this morning and burned the bottom out, and she broke that glass dish that Sarah gave me. I ten times rather do the work myself than have her around.'

Anna Maria did not wait to hear any more, but slipped across the yard and crouched down by the big cherry tree.

She sat very still, looking up at the moon.

Most people would have agreed with Jane that the girl was ugly. She was tall for her age, raw-boned, thin-faced, and had large brown eyes. She was silent, too—sullen, Jane called it—and seldom said a word or hummed a tune as she went painfully about her work, trying to do it well enough not to get scolded.

To-night as she watched the moon and listened to the lonesome things out in the night, singing, singing, two big tears slipped out and went racing down her face. Then two more, and others followed fast. She flung herself face down on the grass and cried and cried.

She was no use in the world, she told herself, and never would be. Her folks were all dead but Jane and Aunt Lily. Jane did not want her, and Aunt Lily had never so much as spoken to her since her mother died. There was nothing she could do to help herself or anybody else. 'And—and I do not want to be ugly and awkward always,' she sobbed.

The next morning when Anna Maria came back from the spring house, where she had gone to get the milk for dinner, someone was in the front room talking to Jane.

"Well,' said the visitor, and the voice sounded like Aunt Lily, 'you let her come and stay with me three weeks.'

Jane very willingly gave her consent.

Anna Maria went in and shook hands very gravely. Aunt Lily was a wonderful person. She wore soft dresses, had pretty white hands and beautiful blue eyes.

She was very rich and 'stuck up,' so Jane had said, and never had 'to turn her hand over to do a thing.'

It was a fine June day, and Anna Maria listened silently to the smooth, gentle voice of Aunt Lily as she talked about the beautiful things they saw growing by the road.

'Isn't that a splendid tree!' she would say. 'Look at those wild grape vines. Isn't it fine to be out where things grow?' for Aunt Lily lived in town.

Sometimes Anna Maria answered, but usually she did not. She just sat and rested and listened as the carriage went whirring along the smooth white road.

She was happy, yet dreaded to have her Aunt Lily see how awkward she was and how unfit to do anything.

It was about 4 o'clock when they arrived. Aunt Lily's house was large and stood in a wide, grassy lot.

It looked nice inside, but it was not filled with glass things, gold-thread cobweb or any of the scores of breakable things which she had imagined.

'Now this is your own room,' said Aunt Lily, taking her upstairs. 'You just take care of it to suit yourself.'

Was not that wonderful—a whole room to herself, to do just as she pleased with! Nobody to tell her not to put this there and that here, or scold her for not doing it at all.

She began to move things around just for the pure joy of doing something without being bossed and nagged.

At dinner she was embarrassed at first, but Uncle John was so friendly, and told such funny stories, that she soon forgot herself.

'She has her mother's eyes,' said Uncle John, speaking to Aunt Lily. 'I always thought her mother had the most beautiful eyes I ever saw, except yours.'

The blood came surging up into Anna Maria's face. It was not a blush, but just joy that somebody thought there was something about her not ugly.

Before the meal was over she spilled a glass of water, and then she wanted to cry, but Aunt Lily smoothed things over and said pleasantly it did not amount to anything, and Uncle John told a funny story of how he had turned a whole pitcher over once when he was a boy visiting away from home.

After dinner they sat on the porch and Aunt Lily read out of a wonderful book.

'Now, Anna Maria, said her aunt, the second day, 'when you grow up into a beautiful woman, and have a home of your own, you will want to know how to do things. I am going to teach you. We will take one thing at a time. Be as careful as you can, take your time for it, and when it is finished go back over it and see if it can be done any better.

'Do not get in a hurry nor be worried if it does not go right. No one can do a thing well the first time. But just keep on practising until you can do it well, then we will take something else. Of course, I expect you will spoil some things and break some. I did, and I suppose all girls do. Do not fret about that. I will not mind, for I expect it.'

The first thing Anna Maria made was an apron. She worked it over three times before she showed it to Aunt Lily. Then she was given another and another until she had finished six.

Next she was given the care of the sitting-room and learned how to sweep and dust well. After that she began to learn to cook, one thing at a time.

The work lasted only part of the day. The rest of the time she spent reading, talking, or driving with Aunt Lily.

There was nothing sullen about Anna Maria's face now, and often her soft, low laugh mingled with her aunt's merry peals. Her eyes grew bright as she open-