

### "ASTRA" AND THE BOYS.

Little Incidents that Go a Long Way toward Changing One's Opinion.

(Correspondents seeking information in this department should address their queries to "Astra," Progress, St. John.)

I cannot say that I ever liked boys either individually or collectively! I have always regarded them as the nearest approach to wild animals that are permitted to roam the streets uncaged and mingle with their fellow creatures unmuzzled. And I have considered a fondness for them as much a cultivated taste as an appetite for caviare or a love of mulligatawny soup. Thomas Carlyle said that boys should be kept under a barrel until they were 25 years old when they reached their maximum of detestability, and I have always held the opinion that if the great martyr to dyspepsia and pessimism had never said or written anything else worthy of note during his lifetime, that one sentence should have immortalized him. I generally feel an intense though, of course, undesired sympathy for the family whose number has recently been increased by the advent of a boy baby. I use I think the family mentioned should look into the future and see what was before them ere that infant was "raised" they would probably commit suicide by common consent, or else sell the baby to the highest bidder.

I confess that I have seen a few boy babies, about three or four in the whole course of my life—whom I would have liked to purchase on the spot and take home to keep; but these were exceptions which only served to prove the rule, and I am sure when I came to my senses and remembered that the baby would have to come a boy in time, and be laboriously dragged through the awful years from six to fourteen, I would have returned with my purchase and offered his original owners any amount of "boot" within reason, to call the bargain off, and take him back again.

Such have been my views nearly all my life and aggravated by the possession of a brother who unconsciously did much to strengthen my natural aversion to the being who is declared by the best authorities to be the father of the man, who, if this idea is correct, certainly has little to be proud of as far as his parentage is concerned.

But of late my views have moderated and I have begun to ask myself seriously whether the boy gets quite "a fair share"—as he would call it himself—in this world. I wonder whether there does not exist in very many minds the same animosity towards him as he seems to cherish in his wicked little heart towards cats, squirrels, birds, and all such members of the animal kingdom which he regards as his lawful prey? And somehow the answer seems to be in the affirmative! I know many good and sweet women who make a practice of ruthlessly chasing the small boy who ventures into their front garden in search of his lost ball, entirely off his domain, and as far out on the sidewalk as possible, and I have heard the same women threaten to call a policeman if the hapless urchin dared to return, and I have also observed the extreme timidity or show of bold defiance a boy invariably assumes when pursuing his lost property into a region known to be in charge of a female guardian. Not long ago I saw an instance of this which made me form an instant resolution of taking the boys side more frequently in the future than I had in the past.

I was sitting in the parlor sewing beside an open window the light lowered blind, and curtains of which hid me from view; out in the street a group of boys were flying a large kite and having a thoroughly good time; but the tail of the kite was too heavy and suddenly it plunged heavily into a tree just inside our gate! There was an awe-stricken silence which could almost be felt, and I leaned back and awaited developments, because I wanted to see what those boys would do next. First they took an anxious survey of all the windows to see if anyone was looking, then one of the bolder spirits patted a small man in a blue and white sailor suit, encouragingly on the back and said—"You go right in and get it Dick, I would if I was you," but somehow Dick did not seem to regard the matter in quite the same light and he coyly declined to win distinction in the battlefield. Several others then invited their friends to enter, without gaining any recruits, and just as a solid phalanx of five boys with Dick at their head and all holding on to each other, had mustered up courage to open the gate a very little way, I slipped out into the hall and suddenly approached on the scene armed with a lacrosse racket! I wish I had possessed a kodak, and could have secured a view of those boy's faces; they did not run, they were so surprised that they had not time, they simply waited for their fate—and the lacrosse bat—to overtake them, and the way they nudged each other and grinned when they realized that the racket was only to be used as a medium for fishing the kite down did my heart good. I knew Dick's manner very well and had the honor of a slight acquaintance with himself, so I delivered the kite into his willing hands, and he had just presence of mind to blush fiercely and gasp out, "Thank you," after which the entire battalion sounded a retreat, and escaped into the street in good order, giggling and triumphant; while I came back to my sewing and did some thinking, the result of which was partly the conclusion that perhaps when one came to know him, the boy was not such a terrible animal as I had previously imagined, and partly—this article.

### ASTRA.

#### One Way of Proposing.

An English writer tells an amusing story of a country house where a regular daily routine is observed, and where there is no chance given one of breaking the monotony. It is of a man who wanted to stay in a country house, thinking it would give him the opportunity of proposing to a girl with whom he had been in love for a long time. His visit was to last a fortnight, but the

last evening came without his having had one chance of being alone with her during the whole time. As he sat at dinner (of course she was at the opposite end of the table), he felt the time was fast passing away, and in a few hours he would no longer be in the same house with her. When the ladies went to the drawing room he would have to sit on in the dining room. His host might allow him to look in at the drawing room for a few minutes that evening, but after that his presence would be required in the billiard room. In utter desperation he took up the menu card and on it wrote: "Will you marry me?" He doubled it up, telling the butler to give it to the lady in question. She read it, and, with the perfect sang froid born only of the nineteenth century, said: "Tell the gentleman 'Yes.'"

### TAILOR-MADE CLOTHES.

Only Tall, Graceful, Handsome Women, with Style, Can Wear Them Well.

"Stable clothes," that is what the word immortal calls the tailor-made gowns so popular among womankind, and not without reason, too, since, as is generally the case, they are adopted by women to whom they should be prohibited. There are a few essentials to the successful wearing of a tailor-made gown frequently overlooked in its selection.

First, the tailor-made woman must be tall and elegant, graceful in carriage, and above all have a certain inherent style of her own sufficiently distinctive to give an air of elegance to the serenity of cut and plainness of material characteristic of the gown.

To a fluffy little woman, with irregular but winsome features, pretty and attractive but not handsome, the severe lines of a tweed or Harris cloth, the unyielding choker, and masculine tie are fatal. The woman of ordinary beauty, lacking in that nameless grace which marks the caste of Vere de Vere—and, indeed, many women who trace their uninterrupted hereditary back to the times of William the Conqueror might start out any day with a basket of unlaundered linen and have no one who met them fancy they had known better things—must beware of the tailor gown. Its imitation has been seized upon by the business woman with such avidity that one may be mistaken for a boarding mistress on a holiday or a stenographer off duty, even a reporter looking for news, which would be more undesirable than to be caught breaking the eighth commandment. Last and most important of all, the tailor-made woman must have a faultless figure or a figure capable of being made perfect according to the tailors' code of beauty. Lacking in any of these qualities, the woman who would be well dressed should shun the tailor, search out a kindly disposed and clever dressmaker who understands modelling with cotton and adapting modes, and abide by the result.

### The Plucky Western Girls.

Two young women of Chester, Ill., have begun a new invasion of the masculine field. They are the daughters of Simon Lang. As Mr. Lang was a butcher it occurred to him that women might be butchers as well as men. In consequence of his logic his two daughters, Mary and Carrie, both handsome young girls of 16 and 19, of robust health and splendid physique, do nearly all the work in the slaughter house. The old gentleman draws the steer into the place of execution and deals it a blow which lays it at full length and then leaves the rest to his girls, while he goes to town and attends to his retail business. In a jiffy the life stream flows from a large gash in the throat of the prostrate animal, and as soon as the convulsive muscular contractions cease, these two girls, with keen edged knives, run around the foot, up the leg to the knee, which is cut off and thrown aside, and the hide is folded back, disclosing the red meat and white fat as the snip, snip, snip of their sharp knives wave back and forth.

The united strength of the girls turns the windlass which raises the beef to the ratters, where it rests during the act of disemboweling and division into two parts. The girls are adepts in the manufacture of all kinds of sausage, and say that while they do not like their business they do the work to save their father the expense of hiring a man to do it while they would be compelled to sit in idleness or hire out in some one's kitchen.

To see these girls in holiday attire no one would suspect that their hands were ever soiled in a slaughter house. They are pretty and stylishly dressed and have many admirers among the young men of the town.

### Original Definitions of a Wife.

The pretty school teacher, for a little diversion, had asked her class for the best original definition of "wife," and the boy in the corner had promptly responded: "A rib."

She looked at him reproachfully, and nodded to the boy with the dreamy eyes who seemed anxious to say something.

"Man's guiding star and guardian angel," he said, in response to the nod.

"A helpmeet," put in a little flaxen-haired girl.

"One who soothes man in adversity," suggested a demure little girl.

"And spends his money when he's flush," added the incorrigible boy in the corner.

There was a lull, and the pretty dark-eyed girl said slowly:

"The wife is the envy of spinsters."

"One who makes a man hurry and work," was the next suggestion.

"And keeps him from making a fool of himself," put in another girl.

"Someone for a man to find fault with when things go wrong," said a sorrowful little maiden.

"Stop there!" said the pretty school teacher. "That's the best definition."

Later the sorrowful little maiden sidled up to her and asked:

"Please, teacher, aren't you going to marry that handsome man who calls for you nearly every day?"

"Yes, dear," she replied; "but with us nothing will ever go wrong. He says so himself."

### SEASONABLE RECEIPTS.

Specially Prepared from Practical Tests for the Lady Readers of "Progress."

(Correspondents seeking information in this department should address their queries to "Editor Seasonable Receipts," Progress, St. John.)

#### Breakfast.

Life within doors has few pleasanter prospects than a neatly arranged breakfast table.—Hawthorne.

In view of the day's adventure Whatever of ill befall, The steak and the fragrant coffee Hath power to cheer withal.

Between the smiles and the muffins, Croquettes and the kindly jest; Surely of all reflections The morning repast is best.

Fruits of tropical flavor, Flowers, the eye to greet, And faces of happy children Than flowers fairer and sweet.

Purest of glass and damask, Best of the Haviland ware, Best love is queen of the household scene, Nor scorneth at humble fare.

For love in a cot or palace, Wherever true love is known, Is soul of the feast, for so it is writ, None liveth by bread alone.

—Isadore Baker in Table Talk.

There is not much poetry about the average breakfast, I am afraid—it is too often an hastily prepared and hastily eaten repast, but this fact does not rob the above lines of their truth and beauty. We cannot all have Haviland china; the purest of cut glass, and fine damask, it is true, but what we have can be as carefully laid and neatly arranged. The wild flowers and ferns are not all gone yet. The goldenrod has just commenced to show its beauty, and what could be more charming for a center-piece than a vase of this delightful flower. We need more smiles and flowers at our breakfast tables, and that is why I copy the above lines.

#### Something about Butter.

Here is a "wrinkle" that is probably as old as the hills, and yet how many housekeepers know, or if they know, practice it! It is new to me anyway, but having proved its efficiency, and believing it to be not generally known, I give it for the benefit of my readers. It is simply a "sugar pickle" to restore butter that has "gone off" to its original freshness. Make a simple syrup by boiling a cup-full of sugar in a quart of water, let cool, and pour over the butter. In three or four hours the butter will be as good as ever it was. It is claimed that this simple remedy will restore tainted meat. I am indebted to my second cook for this information.

#### Here and There—About Food.

One thing that strikes me very forcibly is that certain articles of food that are greatly esteemed in one place are looked upon as almost worthless in another. Take for example, tommy cods and fresh herring. In Montreal and elsewhere they are much sought after, and are considered delicacies, while here, the tommy cod, though plentiful, are rarely for sale, and the fresh herring are considered "vulgar farin"; indeed, so much so that my "help" turn up their noses at them when they are placed before them.

Again, there's shrimps, which abounds in the creek at Courtney Bay, but they are seldom offered for sale, because there is no demand for them. The first time I saw them I thought I was in great luck (we who cater hail with peculiar delight anything that is new, that we may be able to place before our customers); I remember on this occasion there was only one order for shrimps, and it came back to the kitchen almost untouched.

Much as people everywhere tire and complain of the eternal sameness of their fare when they continue in one place for any length of time, it is nevertheless a most difficult thing to introduce a dish with which they are not familiar.

Not many years ago a New York hotel keeper paid a visit to the South, and while there, with an eye to business, formed the idea that there was an opening for a really good hotel in a certain town. He had been unable to get what he called a "decent meal," and he would show them how to live. He built and started a strictly first class house and ran the restaurant on the New York plan, but he soon failed, and returned to New York disgusted. "I wanted to give the people of — a good hotel," he said to a friend afterwards, "but they would not support me." The fact was the people did not want his style of living, and he thought too little of theirs to conform to the customs of the country, and so he failed.

There is one article of food, however, for which there is common liking the world over, and nowhere, perhaps, are

#### Oysters.

to be found that excel in delicate flavor those of our sister province, Prince Edward Island. The Malpeque oyster, eaten raw off the deep shell, needs no seasoning but its own juice. By the time this is in print they will be on the market. They are supposed to be in season from the 1st of September, but we rarely get them before the middle of the month.

#### How to Open Oysters.

Hold the Mollusk firmly with a cloth in the left hand, with the roughest part down, and the hinge towards the wrist. Insert the point of the oyster knife carefully just before the edge of upper shell, give a quick decided pressure until the point is felt to glide along the inner surface of the under shell. Force it sharply to the hinge, give a smart wrench rather towards the right hand, and off comes the shell. Separate the oyster from its attachment, and let it fall into the under shell, floating in its juice, lift it quickly to the lips, and eat it before the delicate aroma has been dissipated into the atmosphere. The method employed by most of the "smart" openers in restaurants is just the reverse, for they open them on the flat shell which makes them look more plump and fat, but all the liquid is lost—except when they are selling them by the quart, then they contrive to save every drop of liquor in order to help fill the measure, and you cannot very well "kick," but oysters bought by the quart are generally used for frying, scallops, etc., and you have no use for the liquor. That, perhaps, is the reason you get it. Such is life.

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#### An Easy Way to Open Oysters.

No knife is required. Wash the shells in cold water with a brush. Place them deep shell down on the hot clear fire. In a little while a hissing sound is heard, and the shells begin to open. There is no rule for ascertaining the precise point at which the cooking is completed, for every one has his own taste and must learn by experience. A little practice soon makes perfect. Take them off the fire with a pair of tongs and eat them hot. No one who has not eaten oysters dressed in this primitive mode has the least idea of the piquant flavor of which they are capable. Stewed in their own juice, the action of fire only brings out the full flavor, and as the juice is consumed as well as the oyster there is no waste, and no dissipation of the indescribable but potent aroma. The same result is attained by baking in an oven, but the broil is perhaps the sweetest way.

#### Oysters Fried Without Eggs.

Mixed rolled bread crumbs or cracker dust and flour together, about half and half, but the former rather the larger. Have some milk in a shallow dish. Dip the oysters out of their own liquor into the mixed meal and flour, out of that into the milk, then into the mixture again. If there is time let them lie a while before frying. Handle carefully so as not to rub the coating off, as it will not adhere a second time.

If a frying basket is not used, have enough lard very hot in a deep pan to quite cover the oysters. Drop in a few at a time, fry 3 or 4 minutes, take out with a skimmer when light brown and drain on paper or a cloth to free them from grease. If the lard is deep and hissing hot, they come out crisp and dry, yet full of the juice of the oyster. If simmered in lard that is only half deep enough, the bread-crumbs peel off like so much greasy pudding. If too many are put into the pan at once, the temperature of the fat will be reduced and the oysters will be greasy and indigestible.

#### Steamed Oysters.

A restaurateur in Philadelphia has made quite a hit in serving steamed oysters. They are simply washed, put into a steamer, deep shell down, and steamed about four minutes, or until the shells open and the upper shell can be easily torn off. They are served on the deep shell with pepper, salt and butter, but many prefer to eat them without any accessories beyond a little thinly cut brown bread and butter, which is the better way.

Nothing can add to the flavor of a good oyster when it is raw or lightly cooked as above, but as I have pointed out, you cannot tell people how they shall eat, and everyone must please his or her own taste. I have known professional cooks to utterly destroy the flavor of fresh mushrooms by squeezing lemon juice and sprinkling chopped parsley over them, and if asked why they do it, they will probably say, as one man told me once, "we cook by precept and he must be right."

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