

"ASTRA'S" TALKS WITH GIRLS.

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

This long, cold period of dreariness which it seems sarcastic to call spring, is very wearing on the nerves, and worse still, on the complexion, isn't it girls? I have positively lost all appetite, and that is a very bad sign with me. I wonder if we shall be able to lay aside our furs at all this year and take comfort in our spring gowns? I saw one robin a few weeks ago, who looked as if he was just recovering from gripe, and who made me think of that clever verse by a deathless though anonymous poet:

"In the spring a bitter east wind freezes up the rob-in's breast,
In the spring the wanton lapping drops of cold upon its nest,
In the spring a muggy moisture drops from the be-draggled dove,
In the spring a shaking drive drives a man from thoughts of love."

He did look so wretched, and I firmly believe he went straight back to the sunny south, and told his friends how things were there, for I have never seen a robin since.

DOTTIE, St. John.—Of course you can be "one of my girls, too." I shall be very glad to add such a nice little damsel to my list, and I am especially glad to know that you love me; one can't have too much love in this world, you know, and I do hope the girls, "and the boys, too," really love me a little. I begin to feel as if I stood at the head of rather a large family, but I am afraid you would cease to look upon me as "a heroine" if you saw me.

Yes, you are ten times more of a heroine than I, my dear little girl! Do you know that your impetuousness of the gentle "Sarah" was really a fine piece of rhetoric on paper, and I am sure if that amiable female could have heard it she would have retired even further into her "kennel" and trembled in her retirement. So you and the other girls are going to "make war on Moncton" if she does not let me alone in future, so that "the precious 'Sarah'" will have to make herself mighty scarce? Well, you see, she did take care to make herself scarce and fire from an ambush all along; but never mind her. I think I said before that she merely succeeded in showing me how many friends I had, so I can afford to say—Hurrah for the girls of St. John! They are worth a thousand Sarahs! And now about your own affairs. (1) You will have to wear a skirt of some dark color, unless, of course, you have one to match the blazer, in which case it should be a little darker gray. I am afraid black and navy blue are the only other colors that would look well, and be sure you wear a pink tie or knot of pink ribbon at your throat, otherwise the effect will be a little sombre. (2) It is very hard, indeed, for both of you, and you have my sincere sympathy. You cannot disobey your natural guardian, but neither can you obey him in justice to yourself and another. No parent has any right to destroy a child's happiness, and money is a very small matter in the long run compared with happiness. "Jack" must be a very fine fellow, I think, and it is hard that you cannot marry him and be "happy ever after" but don't give him up. Surely he will believe you if you assure him that it is not your fault; he ought to understand how unpleasant it would be for you to live in a state of constant opposition to your father, as long as you are dependent upon him, owe him a reasonable amount of obedience. Can you not write and explain matters to "Jack," assure him of your love, and fidelity, and at the same time tell your guardian decidedly that you cannot look upon his choice in any way but as a friend, and that you dislike raising hopes which can never be realized, by going about with him, and accepting his attentions? I also, like Jack all the better for being so conscientious, it shows that you have made a wise choice, and I do not think you can do a wiser thing than wait for him till he is able to marry. That is the best advice I can give you. Write whenever you like, by your letters long or short. I will give "Geoffrey" your love with pleasure, and perhaps I had better hug the pup. So you "love dogs and babies?" I like the latter too—in moderation—but I don't know very much about them, we never had any at our house, so they are a sort of mystery to me. Your writing is rather like a man's and looks as if you were very young, but it is not bad at all, and the letter was well and correctly written, as far as style and composition went. Give my love to Jack when you have an opportunity.

MEG AND JOE, St. John.—I am glad you take so much interest in the column, and I am here to be "bothered" as you say. (1) I should think him rude, of course, but I am afraid it is a very common form of rudeness; so many men seem to think that they can stare at a girl to an unlimited extent without her finding it out, so long as they employ an opera glass as a medium. But at the same time did you ever notice what mistakes one can make in a case of that kind? You can never be quite certain whether a person is looking at you or not, so perhaps the young man referred to was looking at some friend of his who sat either in front of or behind you. I shan't tell you anything about flirting, nor "how it can best be done," except that black eyes are supposed to be the best adapted to that exercise, and that you will probably learn how to go about it soon enough. (3) Eighteen is the usual age for a girl to come out, and her family usually give a party on that occasion, though it is not strictly necessary, as she can make her entrance into society just as well at the house of a friend, or even at a public hall. (4) I should think him very vain and foolish, and if I happened to be his wife I think I should make it a little unpleasant for him occasionally. Your questions were perfectly natural for girls of your age, and I will always be glad to answer any others that you care to ask.

SCHOOL BOY, Nova Scotia.—Not at all, School Boy. I did not regard your silence as a rest at all, and I believe you know that quite well, because I told you so before, but I have been making you conceited, and you

like to hear me say it again. You are very kind to say those attacks were caused by jealousy, and I daresay you are quite as "clever" as I am, only you see I am ever so much older than you. Just wait till you are my age and we shall see. Well it is a pity, and you will find it a little tiresome no doubt, but you know we cannot always succeed in everything we undertake, so better luck next time. *Only-eloopes*, with very little sound given to the g. Of course they are mistakes. "Di-lo" was a girl and equalled them. I have never heard it sung but I know the music is nothing at all, and the words less, it possible. I don't think it can be compared with Annie Rooney for a moment, I was very fond of Annie, and I am still, I thought the little song very melodious and haunting. Yes, square envelopes are quite correct for ceremonious use, and when you are writing to a lady. You know I am always glad to hear from you. I think I saw a friend of yours a short time ago. You might ask her for me if it tenth remedy proved a cure. She will understand. Did you not send me a list of the different meanings attached to moles on various parts of the body? You did not sign any name, but I am sure it was your writing. Thank you very much for your thoughtfulness.

JUMBO, Moncton.—So you are from Moncton, Jumbo? Well, how in the world did you manage to get your letter all the way to St. John for a one cent stamp? I should like to know the secret. I did not think it could be done for less than three cents. So you think she is a woman? I scarcely agree with you, but I may be mistaken, and you write as if you knew. You do not tell me who you came to be criticised. If you have the slightest idea of the extraordinary disadvantage under which I frequently write I think you would quite understand an occasional lack of smoothness in my sentences and even wonder how I ever managed to write at all. I was greatly amused at your description of your own trials in that line, but after all, yours was only a letter, and what would you say if I told you several of my most ambitious literary efforts during the past winter were written to a sort of intermittent accompaniment of banjo, tin whistle, bones, and mouth organ, not to mention the vociferous barking of the pup, by way of applause? I don't think Harriet Beecher Stowe, herself, could have written very smoothly under those circumstances, and she was noted for writing under difficulties. Thank you most sincerely for the compliment; I always thought they were a little lacking in Christian charity, and I do believe you are right about the moderately well favored women being satisfied with a mere man, while the less attractive ones want an angel—and keep on wanting, because there is nothing man hates, like being regulated and improved, and continually pulled up, to see how he is getting on, as we used to pull up plants when we were children. He is sure to fly to some one who will take him as he is and think him quite nice enough for everyday life.

A creature not too bright or good,
For human nature's daily food,
For human nature's simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, sorrow, hisses, tears and smiles.
And that is about all we are justified in expecting, I think, for we each of us are far enough yet from perfection ourselves, Heaven knows, to make us lenient with the failings of others.

SPARROW, St. John.—I am always glad to win a new friend, so you may be numbered amongst my friends, "and welcome." Return the call within two weeks if possible. "Miss Mary Robinson" looks best, but the initials are also used. Write whenever you please, as you are quite right about my taking an interest in the girls and liking them to write to me, and your wee bit of a note was no trouble to answer.

R. S., St. John.—Just exactly! Here you are again, and you are most welcome. I never thought you abrupt at all, and even if you had been I should have understood it quite well, as I am generally in just that sort of hurry myself. I have had so many worries of my own all my life that it would be strange if I could not find time to take a little interest in those of other girls. I cannot really point out one serious fault in your writing, which is clear and legible, except that, like myself, you have a slight tendency to make your y's and g's almost alike, and when you expect to "write," you understand, you have to be very careful about such things, as they sometimes cause unpleasant mistakes. I think your hand writing especially suited for the purpose you speak of, which sometimes pays quite well. I believe, or used to, but now I am afraid that typewriting has interfered with it a good deal. Could you not learn typewriting? I think it is very easy. If you have any friend who is a lawyer, or in a lawyer's office, he could give you some valuable advice about the writing and how it could be obtained. I am writing for you to understand only, so that will explain my ambiguity. I do remember the articles, and I thought them very good indeed. Yes, they do sometimes get lost, I am sorry to say, but I do not think the one you mention would, as they would be very careful of it. If you do not hear soon write again. Perhaps it has been kept until there was room to publish it. You know I have nothing to do with any department but my own, so I would not be very likely to see it, though I would be happy to do anything in my power for you. I am quite sure they would be worth quite respectable remuneration. Why not try *The Ladies' Home Journal* of Philadelphia or *Toronto Saturday Night*. I am sure you would succeed. I hope I have answered as you wished, I thought it best to use only the initials, and I am sure you will understand. Some of the questions had to be answered rather plainly. No! I did not answer the "open letter" at all. I thought it utterly uncalled for, but as I am sure it was not meant to be offensive, I did not consider a reply necessary. Will you be sure to write to me whenever you think I can be of any use to you, and I shall be glad to help you if I can? ASTRA.

SEASONABLE RECEIPTS.

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

Oyster Kromeski.

"Cousin Madge," in the *London Truth*, writes, "Before oysters go out of season try these lovely kromeski. Take twenty large oysters, which blanch, and then drain and chop very fine. Put in a saucepan on the fire an ounce of butter, the same of flour, a pinch of salt, the same of pepper and nutmeg, and mix all well together. Add the liquor of the oysters and half pint of milk, stir with a wooden spoon till just before the mixture begins to boil, then remove it from the fire, add two yolks of eggs beaten up with a tablespoonful of water, and then add the oysters. Put this mixture on ice until cold, form it into balls about the size of an egg and wrap each one in a thin slice of fat bacon; break three eggs in a bowl, add six ounces of flour and a little water, so as to make a smooth paste, but sufficiently solid to adhere to the oyster farce. Then add a teaspoonful of soda to the paste, with which cover each ball and fry in very hot lard. When it is a bright yellow color, serve hot." This has been tried and is recommended to the readers of *PROGRESS*.

About Rhubarb.

I wonder where it got the name of "pie plant." I think it must have been in New Brunswick for I have never heard it called by that name anywhere else. I do not admire the name, and do not think it at all appropriate, for while it does make excellent pies, it is more useful in many other ways. Coming into season in the spring of the year, just as apples are going out, and before fresh fruit comes in, it is therefore a most valued production. It is appetizing as well as wholesome, and it is excellent for purifying the blood. It seems a pity that it is not better understood generally—nor is it the best cooks that know most about it, for I have worked with French chef who were without doubt the best cooks in this country but who were ignorant of the simple method by which rhubarb is made delightfully pleasing to the eye as well as to the palate. I have to give my wife credit for my knowledge of it and when I asked her where she learned it, she simply said "Oh, it is just the way that ma does it." Ah! the pies our mothers made. Does it not make our mouths water, almost to think of them? We seldom get them now, alas! or is it that the pies are all right yet, but that our palates have become jaded and our digestive organs impaired, and pie is no longer to us what it once was? But I am wandering from my subject—that is, stewed rhubarb, or

Compote of Rhubarb.

A compote of any fruit is made by stewing in syrup so as to keep the original shape, not broken or mashed up. Too often stewed rhubarb is a colorless, messy looking, sour, colicky mess, that is altogether unappetizing and unfit to eat. This is the way to prepare it for a compote which can be used also for pies and is better than the raw fruit. Wipe or wash, but not peel the rhubarb, because the color is in the peel and if it is taken off you lose the color. Cut it into one and a quarter inch lengths and put it into a large flat pan or dish, and sprinkle over it baking soda in the proportion of a teaspoonful to a pound of rhubarb. Then pour on sufficient boiling water to a little more than cover it, stir it about gently with a wooden spoon for a few seconds, and drain the water off. Pour on a second lot of boiling water, stir as before and drain that off. Then add sufficient sugar to make a syrup, and stew very gently for 15 minutes—a very small quantity of sugar will be needed as compared with the ordinary method, because the sourness is taken out in the scalding with the soda—avoid stirring, and thus mashing up the pieces while it is stewing. Each piece should be separate and whole, retaining its colour and when served (cold) in a neat glass compote dish it forms a pleasing contrast to the result by the usual method.

To Boil Spinach.

This needs the least cooking of any kind of greens, and will boil away in the water it let on two long. Pick it over, wash it and let it lie in a pan of cold water. Then put in into water that is already boiling—plenty of water—with a pinch of soda or ammonia to keep it green, and boil about fifteen minutes. Drain it on a colander, press all the water out, season with salt, pepper, and butter. Serve it as is or chop very fine and put back in the saucepan again to warm. It is claimed by some that spinach is better after it has been warmed up two or three times. It is also served with poached egg on top, or the egg and spinach chopped up together, called *Epinards a la creme*. A gentleman who was fond of having his vegetables good, managed his spinach after this fashion; say it was boiled on Monday, and sent to the table, properly seasoned, as the cook supposed; it was sent away untouched. The next day it was warmed up, with an additional piece of butter, and again not eaten; and so on for four or five days, each time absorbing more butter; until the gourmand, finding it sufficiently good, made an end of it.

Lobster Curry.

Pick the meat from the shell of a medium sized lobster, and cut it into neat square pieces. Mix a dessertspoonful of curry smoothly with a quart of a pint of good stock, or if no stock handy, smash the shell of the lobster and boil it in a little water. This will be better than plain water. Mince two small onions finely. Fry them in a little butter until they are tender but not too much browned, dredge a teaspoonful of flour over them, pour over them the curry powder and the stock, and stir the mixture until it thickens. Put into it the pieces of lobster, and stew gently for half an hour. Just before serving add a tablespoonful of lemon juice, strained. To serve, pick out the pieces of lobster and pile on a hot dish and pour the sauce over it. Send rice boiled as for curries to table with it. Sufficient for three or four persons. Probable cost twelve to fifteen cents.

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The millinery of the season is fantastic to the verge of the ridiculous, and recalls the early Victorian era, with its high, narrow crowns, lacy brims, its huge posies, broad ties and vivid coloring. Even the full flowing veil in which our grandmothers delighted is among the late novelties, made of the finest lace, wrought in a deep border, gathered upon a rubber cord at the top, that it may be pushed to one side instead of being raised, and falling below the waist. Beneath the brim of the black leghorn poke which this veil adorns, deep crimson roses are crowded closely along one side, and a row of rhinestones fastens the veil at the top. Among the prettiest hats are the white straw sailor of coarse braid, with broad flat brims and low crowns, trimmed with white satin ribbon tied in a bow about a cluster of white clove blossoms at the side. A picturesque hat of green Tuscan straw with a gracefully bent brim, finished with wired black guipure lace, has a double bow of black velvet ribbon edged with gold and drawn through a buckle of rhinestone set in gold. The ribbon passes straight about the crown and ties again with long streamers at the back. A graceful feature of the hats for summer wear is the long scarf of mull or chiffon which is twisted about the crown and knotted at the back, whence it falls to be coquettishly wound about the throat and tossed back over the shoulder. A broad-brimmed leghorn hat, falling in pretty curves about the face, has its absurd little crown, enveloped in a scarf of pale blue liberty tissue, with half a dozen American beauty roses falling from the back upon the brim. Chip hats are again introduced as novelties on the ground that everything is new when it is old enough. They are profusely trimmed with flowers, and adorned with a large bow of ribbon tied with careless grace and caught so lightly in its place that the wonder is that it does not fly away in the first gale. A hat without a sparkling buckle somewhere in its trimming is hard to find, and small, close hats for morning and traveling wear have for their only decoration the clasp of bravely sparkling brilliants. Occasionally a bonnet is seen adorned with real gems in the French fashion, but the effect scarcely warrants the expense, so perfect is the imitation of the paste jewels.

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