

**"ASTRA" TALKS WITH GIRLS.**

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

JUANITA, St. John.—The subject is rather a delicate one I confess, but still I shall be very happy to give you all the information in my power. Nothing is easier than to surmount the difficulty you speak of. Simply have the legend, "no presents received" engraved, or written at the foot of the invitations; this will not only be perfectly good form, but will be in accordance with one of the latest fashions which has been introduced in New York society, as an attempt to reform an abuse which has gradually grown out of an old and very sensible fashion. The custom of giving presents to a bride originated in Germany and Holland where it was considered a thoughtful and kindly thing to help the young couple, who were starting out for themselves, by giving them such useful gifts as feather pillows, feather beds, sheets, towels and table linen, or even a horse, a cow, a couple of sheep or some hens, but the gifts were nearly always confined to the relatives or very near friends of the bride and groom. It was a pretty and a very kindly custom for those who had "gathered gear" to share their abundance with the beginners, and it arose from the best of motives; but what the ancestors began the descendants carried to excess, and the wedding present nuisance is one which has been written and spoken about by so many able pens and tongues that there is little or nothing left to say upon the subject. Of course I am referring now to the large cities in the United States and perhaps in Canada, where an invitation to a wedding means the expenditure of at least \$25 unless one wishes to look very mean indeed amongst the other guests. I should be sorry indeed to be understood as condemning the fashion of bringing some little gift to the bride, by her friends. I am merely referring to the cold calculation frequently shown in the upper circles in the selection of guests, the bride's family deliberately picking out the wealthiest of their acquaintances to be honored with invitations, and calmly calculating upon the value of the presents expected.

To pass on to your question about silver weddings, the same habit soon prevailed, and many of the more sensitive society people actually dreaded to celebrate their tin, wooden, china or silver weddings, by any festivity whatever, fearing that it might appear as if they took that method of replenishing those household articles which constant use had worn out.

Thus it was that a few thoughtful people decided to attempt a reform, two or three years ago, and the result was that the words quoted above began to appear on the invitations to wedding anniversaries, with what result I am not prepared to say; but you may rest assured that it will be perfectly correct for you to use them. It is an understood thing that such an invitation has no meaning for those old and intimate friends who may wish to offer the bride and groom some little gift, and who are entitled to show their regard in that way. It is simply meant to show that presents are not expected, and will not be received from comparative strangers. The invitations should be on plain white paper, or cards, and if possible engraved in silver letters, and should bear the hostess' maiden name engraved below that of her husband; beneath this again is the date of the marriage. The bride and groom should stand together to receive their guests, just as they did 25 years before, and if it were possible have their bridesmaids and groomsmen beside them—but of course this is rarely practicable. The bride should avoid wearing a black dress, any other color being preferable, and the groom should of course wear evening dress. I hope these few hints will be of some service to you, and if I have neglected any details which you wish to know, write again and I will try to remedy the oversight.

HOPE, Fredericton.—I am glad you have not forgotten me, as I remember you very well, and you are very welcome back again. Do you know that you have given me rather a hard task, as it is so difficult to give advice without understanding the circumstances? But I will do the best I can, considering the very meagre light you have given me. It would be easier if you told me the cause of the coolness, and whether you had any cause for feeling offended. You know it is just possible there may have been some misunderstanding, and if so, what time could be better for healing all differences than this season of general peace and goodwill? If you think you can do so, consistently send your friend a Christmas card, and that will open the way for an explanation, and a reconciliation. Let me know whether this advice is satisfactory, because you know I am only "groping" in the dark, like poor "Joe".

EUENICE, Richibucto.—I think it has been a perfect winter so far, and I only wish it would never be any colder; but I do not lay any such flattering unction to my soul, for I am perfectly certain we shall catch it by and by, and that the thermometer will crawl down below zero and stay there till everything is congealed. I never skate. I consider "Donovan" by far the best of Edna Lyall's works, unless her latest venture, which I have not read, may have excelled it. I believe she has written one quite lately, but really I cannot think of the name, though I have seen it. Thank you very much for the good wishes, which

I beg to return with interest. Be sure and write again. There was nothing wrong with the writing—it was delightfully legible, and you know that is the greatest consideration in a newspaper office.

EVELINE, Fredericton.—It is not at all necessary to give a christening party, but if you wish to mark the first great event in baby's life by some little festivity, have the christening at four o'clock on some Friday afternoon, when the church has been heated for evening service, and invite the clergyman and his wife, the godparents, and any other friends you wish, to five o'clock tea, afterwards. Let it be a regular old-fashioned sitting down tea—not a kettle drum and have something very nice. Hot potatoes, and cold turkey, and ham; or else chicken and lobster salad and hot scalloped oysters, with tea and coffee, or tea and chocolate, christening cake, jellies and preserved peaches with whipped cream or you might even have almonds and raisins, and fruit. In short almost anything you like, and that is very dainty; you can make the meal a sort of cross between a late dinner and a high tea. A christening party is about the most difficult form of entertaining one's friends that I know of, because it cannot very well take place in the evening on baby's account, neither can one give a party on Sunday, and Sunday seems the most appropriate day on which to have a religious service; so the next best thing is to choose Friday. What are you going to call the baby?

JACOB, St. John.—Of course the boys are always welcome, I am glad to know that they take an interest in this column, and I have a great many correspondents amongst the sterner sex, but somehow they seem to have fallen off lately. (1) I am sorry I cannot tell you how to make an Aeolian harp, I never made, or even saw one, but perhaps some of our correspondents are better informed on the subject, and can tell us. I shall be grateful to anyone who will do so. (2) I do not know of anything better than rose water; bathe the lids carefully with a little on going to bed, and also in the morning; a camel's hair brush is a very good thing to use for applying the rose water, as it keeps it out of the eyes; they are very painful in cold weather, are they not?

Will some correspondent kindly tell me where I can find the poem beginning:—  
"Israel! Israel! stay thy sickle in vale and hill!"

Before I close this week's Talk, let me remind you, girls, of a few words I wrote last year on the subject of Christmas presents, and if you do not remember them I will say the same thing over again, and beg you to think of the poor children and not lavish all you have to spend upon those who are well able to buy luxuries for themselves. Send the rich girl amongst your friends a pretty Christmas card or booklet, she will be overwhelmed with lovely presents so that yours would be a mere drop in the bucket, and use the dollar you meant to spend upon some pretty trifle for her, in buying four pounds of candy, you can get lovely candy in St. John for 25 cents a pound, get four pretty boxes, fill them with the candy and you will be able to make four children happy on Christmas morning. Or buy three pretty silk neckties with your dollar, you can do it easily, one pale pink, another pale blue and the third pale maize or yellow; give one to the washerwoman's little girl and another to one of your Sunday school children, some girl of fourteen or fifteen who loves pretty things but never owns any, and the third you can give to some friend who is one of a large family living on a small income, and whose chances of buying pretty things are very limited. If none of these methods of spending your dollar meet with your approval, buy a pair of kid gloves with it and send them to your country cousin who finds it hard to make the egg and butter money cloth mother and herself in the plainest manner, and to whom a pair of nice kid gloves for very best will be a real luxury. Do some of these things with your money, dear girls, and I think it will help you to spend what your friend Astra wishes you with all her heart, a very happy Christmas. ASTRA.

**Reasoning Powers in a Cat.**

I was walking in St. James-square on Tuesday morning when I saw a cat before me, looking very weak and weary, carrying something in her mouth. At first I thought it was a rat, but when I heard its little cry I knew it was a kitten. I was interested to see what she was going to do with it. She crawled across the road, and jumped into the square, and carried her burden straight to the crossing-sweeper who was sitting by the rails, and laid it down close to her, as much as to say, "I know you will take care of it for me." The crossing-sweeper is the good Samaritan of cats. She feeds them and keeps them warm, and as much as possible softens the life of misery it appears to be their destiny to lead. This was one of her cats; and she said her last litter were drowned. In the afternoon I called again to inquire, and I found the poor mother had made three more journeys, each time bringing a young one in her mouth, and giving it to her friend I thought this courage and devotion to her young and confidence in one who had been kind to her, was very touching. She evidently knew that if her kittens were left where they were born they would be drowned without mercy, so she brought them to one whom her reason told her would pity and spare them.

It is interesting to know that the writer made provision for the future of the feline family, which will find homes in due course with compassionate cabmen who frequent the rank in the square.—Morning Post.

**In Love With His Princess.**

A pretty love story concerning the late Dowager Queen Olga of Wurtemberg was published in Stuttgart. Forty-eight years ago, when she was the greatest beauty at the Russian court, Prince Bariatski an officer in the Imperial Guard, fell in love with her. When he learned that she returned his love he became alarmed, obtained an audience with Czar Nicholas, and, falling on his knees, implored pardon for his audacity for having loved the daughter of his sovereign.

Pleased with his honorable conduct, the Czar created him Field Marshal and made him Governor of the Caucasus. One year later the Grand Duchess Olga was married to the Wurtemberg Prince. Bariatski acquired some fame in the Crimean War, but never recovered from the moroseness following the disappointment of his love.

**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.]

"S. A. C."—My authority for the statement that "there is no complete perception of taste unless the sense of smell have a share in the sensation" is Brillat-Savarin the "high priest of Gastronomy," but the fact can be easily proved by any one, for instance we all know that when the mucous membrane of the nostrils is irritated by a severe cold in the head, nearly all sense of taste is obliterated, and little or no flavor is perceived in anything that is swallowed, though the tongue retains its normal condition; if the nose is held when eating it will be found that the sense of taste is extremely dull and imperfect, hence the means of getting down the most nauseous medicine almost without perceiving it; connoisseurs of wine never sip a glass of port without first enjoying the "bouquet," and experts in tea tasting depend largely on the sense of smell, for their judgement. So, he who eats an orange in the way described, (see Dec. 3rd) is first agreeably struck by the odor which it yields as he puts it to his mouth; when in his mouth he experiences a sensation of freshness and acidity which induces him to continue, and when it is swallowed, an upward movement of the tongue causes the perfume to reach the olfactory again, and this completes the full taste due to the fruit. If the sense of smell is not an integral part of that of taste, it is at least a necessary assistant, and to intercept the smell is to, partly at least, paralyze the taste. I have often astonished my cooks by detecting the insufficiency or excess of a particular seasoning in soups and made dishes simply by the smell, and without tasting them at all.

"Young cook" writes "you stated last week that a cod should not be boiled whole. Will you please say why." Because the fish is so much thicker at the fore-part of the body than at the tail, that if cooked whole, the thin part would be boiled to rags before the thicker part was cooked.

**An Oyster Supper.**

Here is a suggestion for a dainty little oyster supper and the way to cook it:—Raw oysters on the half shell, quarters of lemon and thin brown bread and butter. Fried oysters, scalloped oysters, rolls, fried brown bread, dressed celery, oysters a la poulette, puff paste cakes, oyster salad, olives, orange jelly, charlotte russe, chocolate, coffee.

**Fried Oysters.**

For six persons provide four dozen large oysters drain them in a colander and season well with pepper and salt, if needed. Have ready a pint and a half of fine dry browned bread crumbs seasoned slightly with salt and pepper. Beat three eggs in a soup-plate, put a few of the crumbs on a large plate, and after rolling the oysters on this plate, one by one, lay them on a board that has been sprinkled lightly with crumbs, when all the oysters have been thus treated, dip them into the beaten egg, one at a time, and roll them in a quantity of crumbs, place them on a large platter, or on plates, but never on top of one another, let them stand for an hour or two in a cool place, when the time for frying comes, put a layer of oysters into the frying-basket, and plunge them into boiling fat so hot that blue smoke rises from the centre, cook for little over a minute; then drain on brown paper, or on a clean cloth. Keep them warm and cook the remainder of the oysters in the same way. Oysters prepared in this way are brown, crisp, juicy, plump and tender.

**Scalloped Oysters.**

Take one quart (solid meat) of oyster drained as free as possible from liquid, three pints of grated bread crumbs (white), a teaspoonful and a half of salt, one-third of a teaspoonful of pepper, and three generous tablespoonfuls of butter. Grate stale white bread, and measure it lightly; spread it in a large dripping-pan, and put it into a moderately heated oven to dry; keep it in the oven for about twenty minutes, stirring frequently; it should be only slightly browned. Now take a baking dish that will hold about two quarts; put a layer of oysters in the bottom, lifting them with a fork, that there may not be too much of the liquor; season with a portion of the pepper and salt, and spread a generous cupful of the crumbs over them. Now spread the remainder of the oysters, taking them up with a fork as before, sprinkle with the rest of the salt and pepper, spread the remainder of the crumbs, dot with a tablespoonful of butter, and sprinkle a little of the oyster liquor. Bake in hot oven 20 to 30 minutes, or till of a nice brown color.

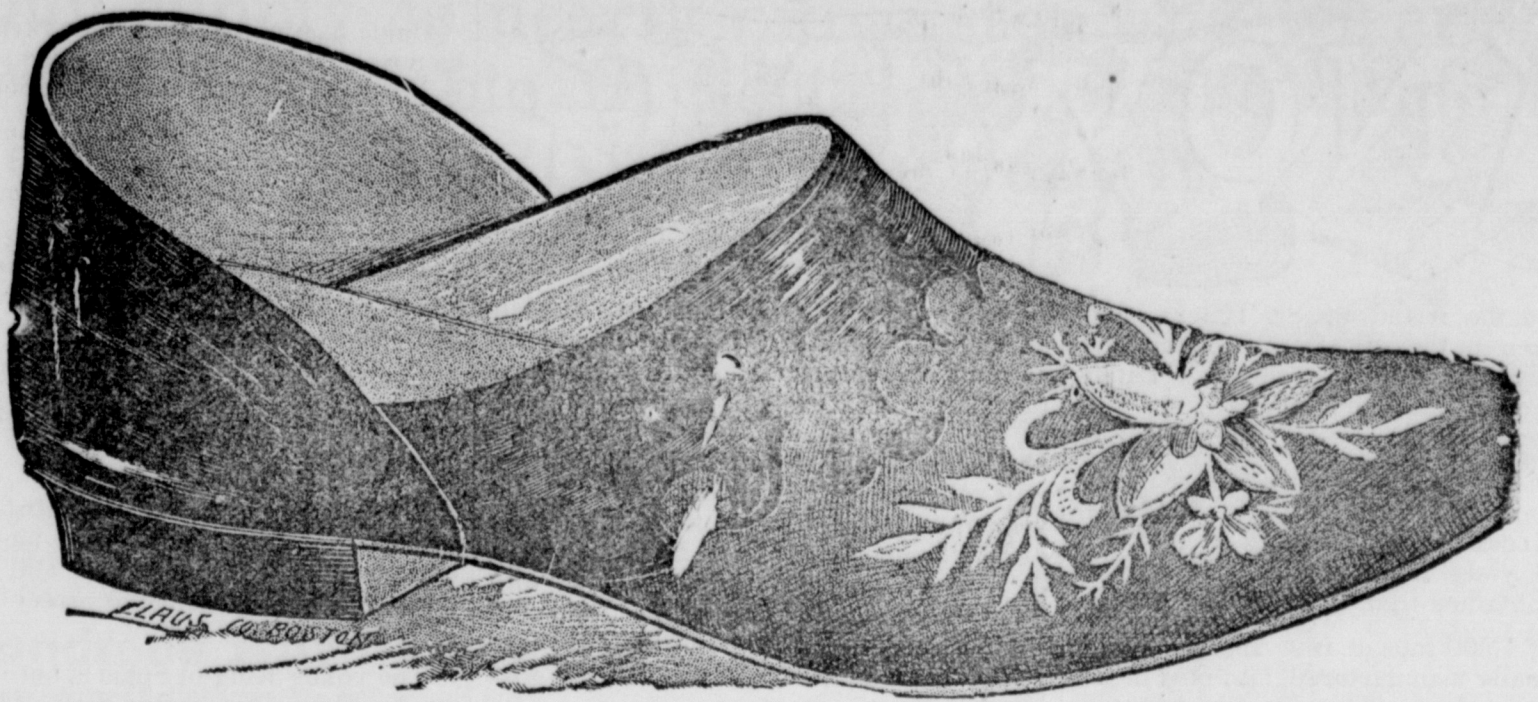
**Oysters a la Poulette.**

Put a quart (solid meat) of oysters on the stove in a good-sized stew-pan, and as soon as they begin to boil skim carefully, and turn into a strainer, and when they have been well drained, set them aside. Put half a pint of the oyster liquor into a saucepan, on the fire, and when it begins to boil stir into it a heaping teaspoonful of flour mixed with three tablespoonfuls of cold water. Boil gently five minutes longer. Put a pint of cream into a double boiler, and when it is thoroughly hot, add the thickened oyster liquor. Season with salt, pepper, a slight grating of nutmeg and a grain of cayenne. Have at hand the yolks of four eggs, well beaten, and add to them half a cupful of cold cream. Now add to the cooking mixture the oysters, a tablespoonful of butter, and finally the egg mixture. Cook for three minutes, stirring all the time; then remove from the fire immediately, and serve. This is the mixture that, when served in a shell of puff paste, is called a vol-au-vent of oysters. Small puff paste cakes, cut out with the fancy cake or vegetable cutters, make a pretty border for this dish.

**Oyster Salad.**

For a quart of oysters use a dressing made as follows:—Beat well four eggs,

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add to them a gill each of cream and vinegar, one teaspoonful of mustard, one of celery seed, one of salt, one-fifth of cayenne, and two tablespoonfuls of butter. Put all into a double-boiler, and cook till it is as thick as soft custard. It will take about five or six minutes. It must be stirred from the time it is put on the fire until it is taken off; and when that time comes, add two tablespoonfuls of powdered and sifted oyster crackers. Heat the oysters to the boiling-point quickly, in their own liquor. Drain them and add the dressing. Stir lightly, and set away in a cool place for an hour or more. This salad may be varied by leaving out the cracker and the celery seed, and at serving time add instead a pint of celery sliced thin.

**Orange Jelly.**

Use the grated rind of two oranges and one pint of strained juice, a pint and a half of water, one pint of sugar, the juice of two lemons, one package of gelatine, and the whites of two eggs. Soak the gelatine for two hours in a half a pint of cold water. Grate the orange rind into a bowl, and pour the juice on it. Let this stand for about two hours. Beat the white of the eggs and stir them into the orange juice. Put all the ingredients into a stew pan and stir over the fire for ten minutes. When the liquid bubbles, draw back, cover, and keep at the boiling-point for half an hour. Strain and mould.

**Charlotte Russe.**

For two moulds, each holding one quart use three quarts of whipped cream, half a package of gelatine the yolks of four eggs, half a pint of milk, one gill of water, a small cupful of sugar, one teaspoonful of vanilla extract, and enough lady fingers or stale sponge cake to line the sides of the moulds. Soak the gelatine in the water for two hours, beat the sugar and yolk of the eggs together, and stir the milk into mixture. Put on the fire in the double boiler and cook for five minutes, stirring all the time, add the soaked gelatine and stir until this is dissolved. Take from the fire and cool, stirring frequently. Line the moulds with the cake, but if you desire to be certain that it will turn out without breaking, first line the mould with wet book muslin, add the vanilla and place the basin in a pan of ice water, stir the custard until it begins to thicken; then add the whipped cream, about one third at a time, stir until the preparation is so thick that it can hardly be poured. Fill the moulds and set away in a cold place to harden, and let them stand for an hour or more, do not turn out until just before serving time.

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