

"ASTRA'S" TALKS WITH GIRLS.

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

PEARL, St. John.—You ask me if I think it proper for a girl to write to a young man, if she is not engaged? And I am so often asked the same question in different words, that I think it would be a good plan for me to write out a permanent rule to be applied with modifications to individual cases, and then every girl who reads PROGRESS can cut it out and put it in her mirror for constant reference.

All my life, since I was old enough to be trusted with the management of my own affairs, I have had a number of male correspondents, but they have all been true and tried friends, whom I have known for years, and between whom and myself there was not the least question of flirtation, or love making; our letters were the letters of one friend to another quite irrespective of sex, and many of them still correspond with me occasionally, with Geoffrey's full consent. I have never found such interchange of ideas anything but improving, provided one's male friends are of the right description, and I think a correspondence with an intelligent friend goes a long way towards teaching a girl the art of writing good letters. Therefore, it is but natural that I should not see any harm in a girl of ordinary sense exchanging letters two or three times a year, with an old friend of the opposite sex, always provided there is nothing clandestine about it, and no one has a right to object in either case. Should one or both become engaged, of course the respective fiancés should be consulted and if desired the correspondence should cease at once. But what I would advise girls most strongly against is the habit some possess of writing to young men who are almost strangers to them, and doing it on the sly, knowing well that their parents would put a stop to it at once should they discover it. I have known girls who have kept up this sort of correspondence with two or three young men at the same time, and so far from being improving, it was entered into and kept up simply for the sake of flirtation. My advice to girls in this respect is summed up in a very few words. Never write or receive a letter you would be ashamed to show to your mother, she will not want to see your love letters when you have a real lover of your own never fear,—and never write to any man without your parents' consent, for just as surely as you do, a day will come when you would give all you possess not only to have those foolish letters back again, but to have them unwritten. A time when you would give a year of your life to be able to tell your lover or your husband that he was the first man you ever wrote to except some old and tried friend. This is my opinion on the subject, and I wish I could impress it on all the girls. You ask me if I think "he" should kiss you before you are married, well it depends altogether upon who "he" chances to be; if he is your intended husband certainly he should, and as often as he likes otherwise he would be a cold lover indeed. Not if he is the young man referred to as not being engaged to her, her own dignity and good sense should answer her without consulting me. Never kiss any man you are not engaged to, except your own near relatives. I read all kinds of books whenever I get time, which is not very often. Yes, I think you will enjoy Scott's novels very much. I like a bold hand writing either in man or woman, and yours is good. I am glad you had such a number of Christmas presents, and hope you spent a happy New Year.

DIAMOND, St. John.—I used to attend watch service whenever it was held, but lately we have not had it in our church, so it is some time since I have attended that most lovely and solemn service. You know there is flirting and flirting! Very frequently the high-spirited, light-hearted girl who is bubbling over with fun, who treats all men alike and who is in consequence immensely popular with the opposite sex, is denounced as a flirt by those who are jealous of her popularity, and nothing could be more unjust, because the real flirt—the one who does the most mischief—is the girl who goes to work quietly and chooses one victim at a time—not the lively dandy who is always surrounded by an admiring throng. But the flirt pure and simple, the mean flirt, which is the one you refer to, I am sure is indeed a very silly creature. I suppose you and "Pearl" are twin jewels as your letters came together; I have not heard from you before but hope I shall again.

Eglantine, St. John.—Many thanks for the pretty card which was by far the oddest and prettiest I received this Christmas it was very good of you to remember me and also to be so considerate about asking questions when you thought I was extra busy. Write whenever you like and I shall be glad to hear from you. It is a delightful season as you say and we all love the rush and excitement tired as it makes us. I hope you had a very happy New Year and a merry Christmas.

Waiting, St. John.—We are all waiting are we not? some for one thing and some for another. I wonder what you are waiting for? never mind, even if that was the last time you could write to me last year, why I hope there are many many years before us both: it is such a step between one year and another, just the striking of a clock you

know divides last year from this. It is a very sad time I admit and if one dwells much upon old memories and worst of all apprehensive speculations as to what the new year may bring us of change, of sorrow or of joy, it is more than sad, it is heart breaking to those who have passed their first youth. But it is well to remember that

"What the New Year may bring on its opening wings
Not one of us mortals can tell,
We can only trust in the goodness of Him,
Who has ever done all things well."

Think you for the kind wishes, and let me return them with interest. Yes, I got numbers of presents, and I am glad you were as fortunate. I should think her rather a gushing dandy and more than usually susceptible, in plainer language a terrible goose. Not always, but in most cases it is supposed to, for instance, if you were to tell me you were a very stupid girl, and I made no response, you might reasonably come to the conclusion that I agreed with you, but on the other hand a well-bred silence is the only available answer to some statements made in your presence, which you do not either agree with, or believe.

LILLIAN, St. John.—(1.) I really was too busy at Christmas to go about and look at the windows, some of those I passed on my way to and from the office, looked very pretty indeed. (2.) I liked the tower, and thought it in as good proportion as it was possible to get in so small a space. (3.) If I were to "define flirtation please" as you ask me so airily to do, I should have to ask the editor for at least a column more space than he could give me and still I should fail to do the subject justice, so I will fall back upon my usual stand by, and answer that "flirtation means attentions without intentions." (4.) True love has been beautifully defined by Jean Ingelow, in "Songs of the Night Watches."

"The love that fed on daily kisses died.
The love that kept warm by nearness lieth
Wounded and wan,
The love love nourished,
Bitter tears distil
And faints with naught to feed upon.
Only there stirr'd very deep below,
The hidden beating slow,
And the blind yearning
And the long drawn breath
Of the love that conquers death."

That I think expresses true love very perfectly. (5.) Yes, I am sure it comes to each of us at least once in our life; sooner or later the blind god strikes us with one of his random, but sharp arrows, and heaven help us if it should be later, because like measles, the older we catch it, the worse it is and the more danger of its proving fatal. (6.) I cannot very well help believing in it, as there are so many well authenticated instances on record, and instances where it has been followed by the happiest of marriages, but it is a very unsafe thing to tamper with, because what the callow victim believes to be the truest and best of love is often only a fleeting fancy, which lives but for a season, and then dies a painless death. (7.) Not for ladies, and I really don't know much about the fashions for men, but I have noticed many society men have shaved off their side whiskers, and bared their cheeks to the icy gale, so I suppose it must be fashionable to wear only a moustache. (8.) What kind of chaps, please. If you mean chapped hands, or lips, use vaseline, cold cream, or rose water and glycerine in equal parts. (9.) It is considered quite proper to walk with any man who is properly introduced to you. But I think once or twice in the course of an evening is sufficient. (10.) Cream colored or white, china silk, net, or cashmere are all pretty and suitable. (11.) Yes, I admire everything that is attractive from a beautiful sunset, to a handsome man, or a pretty girl, but for real solid love and comfort give me a plain looking man, he is less wrapped in himself and his charms, and so he can spare more time to think of others.

Woman Should Avoid Them.

Turnover collars when possessed of a long, thin neck.
Dirty white kid gloves on a rainy day or while traveling.
Fluffy skirt trimming if under 5 feet 4 inches in height.
Hairline stripes, plain skirts and flat vests when thin and slender in person.
Round waist, square yokes, balloon sleeves and excessively tight collars when full in form.
Overtrimmed dresses and hats for traveling, also trains on traveling or tailor made gowns.
Mauve, Nile green, rose pink, clear white, steely gray, yellowish tan and sky blue when of a yellow complexion.
Large hats for shopping and evening wear, and black hats, if of a brunette skin, unless blessed with rosy cheeks.
Collars without a finish in the way of a white cord, plaited ribbon, folds, etc., when of a dark or sallow complexion.
Skin tight bell skirt fronts with a prominent abdomen, and basques very short on the sides with very large hips.
Bright red, emerald green, orange and yellow tan with red hair. Electric blue, unless possessed of a clear, rosy skin and light hair. Short fingered gloves and too tight a fit.

A Pointer for Girls.

An observant American has discovered that performers on wind instruments generally develop dimples in their cheeks, caused probably by the frequent strain on the facial muscles, which are brought into play by the act of blowing. The clarinet, the flute, the cornet, the trombone and the French horn are all said to be excellent factors in producing this little indentation so often vainly courted by artificial means. Perhaps this discovery of cause and effect may lead to its becoming fashionable for girls to play on wind instruments.

French Wives.

The French woman is at once wilful and flexible. She readily stoops to conquer, and is prone to make the best of adverse circumstances from which there is no escaping but through patient effort. All this induces a cheery, practical philosophy which is common in France to both sexes. If her sympathies are quick, her head is cool. It is a pity that they are not wider, they being, in general, wholly spent on members of the immediate family circle.

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."] Church Festival Dishes.

Among all the associations that have been formed for the amelioration of the condition of the human race, is it not wonderful that there has never yet appeared a "society for the improvement of the quality of church suppers." This, of course, would embrace all similar affairs gotten up for the purpose of raising money, such as buying books for the library; furnishing the lyceum hall; buying instruments for the brass band; buying uniforms for the fire company, or for the benefit of some unfortunate and worthy object of compassion and charity. These affairs are taking place too frequently and too constantly to be ignored by any one who is at all interested in the subject of cookery, and so far as this class of cooking is concerned there is nothing needs improvement so much.

The writer has had something to do with scores, perhaps hundreds of them, either directly or indirectly; either willingly or otherwise, and this description on the very latest will nearly fit the culinary management of them all.

The parties interested procure the use of a vacant store and divide themselves into committees, and the supper committee divide into a committee to cook the oysters; a committee to procure and put up the stove, another to prepare sandwiches, another cakes, another pickles and preserves, another the ice-cream, the coffee, and so forth. Some of the articles are to be made at the members' own houses, in the places and with the utensils they are accustomed to, and that part goes on well. A candy maker, who is a member, offers, if they will furnish the sugar, to make the candy, this is done, and that part goes well, and there is a person who thinks it will be good fun to sell candy, and goes and borrows a glass show-case and scales and weights, without waiting to be appointed a committee; so that goes well too. But not so with the cooking. It is a poor festival that will not have a hundred visitors, and perhaps there will be twice that many. They all came with the special intention of eating oysters, if it be in the oyster season, and the managers always undertake to cook them on one rusty little old castaway stove that is not really large enough to do the cooking for one family.

The committee finds the stove in a woodshed where they are directed on the morning of the festival day, but never can find all the stove pipe, and by the time the missing joint or elbow is finally put in place it is pretty well along in the afternoon. The different committees drop in to see whether each other has arrived and then drop out again. About sunset the committee on setting the table grows anxious and sets the coffee boiler on the fire. Then a spectator asks what time they will have the oysters ready, and somebody sits on a tin pail of milk, but as the stove is too small to hold both, the coffee-boiler has to be set back against the stove-pipe, or, perhaps, on the hearth in front.

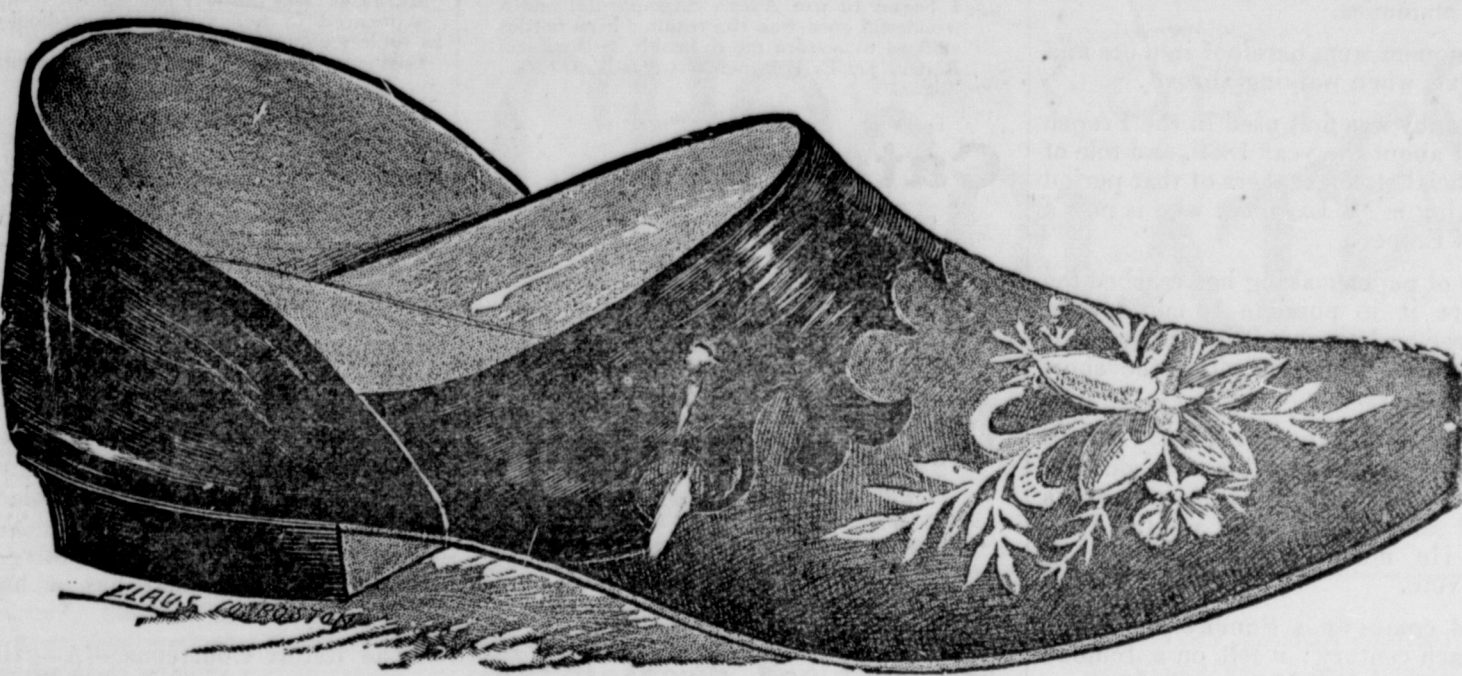
Then the committee on oysters comes in and seem surprised; says that somebody said there was plenty of help, and there was no need to come any earlier, but proceeds at once to fill the stove, which is now much in need of fuel, with chips and the fat rind of the sandwich ham, and ten minutes later all the milk they have in the house is scorched on the bottom and tastes of it. But it has to go all the same, and in go the oysters. Before many dishes of stewed oysters have gone in, the question is asked more and more frequently whether oysters cannot be had in other ways besides stewed and raw, and at last there is a determined demand for fried, and the committee answers yes, they can have them in a few minutes. Then some one discovers that the coffee has never been put in, and that the water does not boil; but no matter, it is hot, and in goes the coffee. The oyster stew kettle is set on the floor, and the coffee-boiler is put on the hottest place for three minutes, then fifteen or twenty waiting cups are filled, the coffee still floating on the top of the water because not cooked, being held back with a spoon. Meantime a skillet has been found, a spoonful of grease is put into it, and it is set over the fire. Somebody rolls a few oysters crackers on the table with a bottle, partly crushing them, but there is neither sieve nor rolling-pin in the house. The oysters are rolled over in the crushed crackers and the skillet is half filled with them. They are then stirred about with a spoon! like so much cold sliced potatoes or hash being warmed up, and sent in a mess of grease, crackers and oysters jumbled together. Somebody ventures to ask whether they would not have been better dipped in egg first, and the committee answers that it would have been too much trouble, and would take too much time, and that they could not afford eggs anyway—which is quite true, and eggs are not necessary to fry oysters properly, as we will show further on.

While this has been going on the discovery has been made that the oyster stew is all gone except some scraps of the liquor, but there are no oysters in it, and half the tables have not been served yet; so the oyster pail goes on the fire again and some raw oysters in it. There is too much clamor for more, to allow it to boil again; besides, half a dozen persons or more must have some tea, and there is no tea, and no committee on tea.

But the water must be hurried to boil, and the oyster frying must go on; so the stew is pushed back and is dished up with the oysters neither cooked nor raw, but warm and repulsive.

We "set down naught in malice" and will not ask the people at the tables how they like the supper, nor what motive, whether of policy or benevolence, they have for paying to partake of it, but supposing the desire all round is to have the supper good, we merely describe the disorder before pointing out our part of the remedy, and would suggest, first, that at every festival of the kind where any cooking, coffee-making or dish washing is to be done, that there should be two stoves at least, and plenty of boiling water ready for all purposes in a reservoir or some vessel that cannot be emptied and taken for another purpose; second, borrow all the kitchen tables that there is room to place, or that can possibly be used for setting dishes on, for provisions, and for cooking operations—the dining-room and its tables will take care of themselves; third, have it positively decided beforehand what is to be cooked, and in what way, and then provide both the necessary materials and the proper utensils; fourth, make the closest estimate possible of the quantities required, based upon the guide here appended, and have it understood where more oysters, milk, butter, coffee, ice, salt, fruit, bread, etc., can be procured if needed, and who will go for them, and, fifth, set some one to cook oysters, at least, who has had experience of larger demands than those of a family table.

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Oyster Stew for Fifty.

A quart of small oysters bulk, "solid meat," contains 8 dozen. A quart of selects, bulk, "solid meat," contains 4 to 5 dozen. A can of selects contains 3½ dozen, generally.

The ordinary, conventional oyster stew, such as people expect to receive when it is cooked to order is a pint bowl nearly full, consisting of one dozen oysters, one or one and a half cups of milk, or milk and oyster liquor, seasoned.

To serve this according to the letter a pint of small oysters should be sufficient for 4 stews; but as stews for a large number are dipped up and guessed there is always a discrepancy, and a pint can only be relied upon for 3 dishes, though a pint of selects may hold out on account of their large size. Proceeding on these calculations provide for fifty stews—9 quarts of small oysters, or 12 to 13 quarts of selects, or 14 to 15 cans of selects; 1½ gallons of milk; ½ gallon of oyster liquor, or water; one pound of fresh butter; one to two tablespoonsful of salt, according to the saltiness of the oysters.

Set the milk on in good time that it may heat gradually and not burn, and put in the required amount of salt, which also helps to prevent burning. A thick metal pot is better than a tin pail for such a purpose. As to measures, it may be remembered that a common wooden pail holds 2½ gallons or ten quarts. Never cook oysters and milk both together from the first.

If it can be done conveniently, instead of setting the oysters over the fire as they are, to heat up gradually, and some to cook and shrink to nothing before others are fairly warm, and probably to burn on the bottom besides, drain them in a sieve or colander, and pour a quart of boiling water over them. The liquor will then run through abundantly. Set it over the fire, boil and skim, then put the oysters in and add the boiling milk. Drop in the butter and take the kettle of oyster stew off the fire. Keep warm, but do not let it boil any more.

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