



# Ellen Osborn's Fashion Letter

New York.—It is not an exciting occupation to sit at a window, pegging a typewriter, but it gives a large acquaintance with children.

Of the babies I see nothing in the coldest weather, the fur robes that fill their carriages leaving only the outline of head or white cap visible.

The tiniest tot of my acquaintance can walk, with difficulty; but the minute the old organ-grinders turn into the street—man and woman, swarthy, bent, wheeling a machine so small as to be contained in a child's toy wagon—a house door opens and a smart nurse deposits on the sidewalk a bundle of white coat, furs, lace and granny bonnet which begins to kick, clumsily, comically, in recognition of a dance tune. About once a minute the tiny tot topples and is set right, only to repeat the performance with variations.

A one-legged Frenchman who sings the "Marseillaise" to the accompaniment of a wheezy accordion has been trying for a share in the Klondike represented by the tiny tot, but without success. About him flock the school children, good to look at in their warm winter colors—deep red cashmeres, plaid work of all sorts, especially gay sorts, bright velveteens and corduroys and brilliant velvet coats, red and blue.

One girl—the joy of my life—wears a striped silk Neapolitan fisherman's cap pulled over the crown of a soft blue felt, much as winter visitors wear them at Capri and Sorrento, except that in Italy the hat, instead of felt, is Leghorn straw.

Others go plowing through the snow in pointed caps, red and brown, like Christmas elves and gnomes.

A lank girl, all legs, looks—a block away—like a page boy in a court procession, with her school bag slung sash-

Santa Claus. Her programme includes a dull red cashmere dress, fine and soft, and made with a sheer white lawn yoke, tucked by hand and crossed with lines of black velvet ribbon. A triple bolero of black velvet is edged with narrow white lace insertion, which also trims the little caps on the shoulders and the velvet sleeves. A velvet overdress, open in front, is lace-bordered and hangs from a folded velvet waistband. The combination of colors—black, white and red—is as popular for children as their elders. By the substitution of velveteen for velvet the expense of this frock could be lessened without detracting from its appearance.

Another very effective and picturesque dress for the same child is of blue serge, and has the semblance of an overskirt, formed by a trimming of bright red moire ribbon, threaded through straps of cloth. The waist has belt, bretelles and sleeves showing the same decoration.

For a younger sister, possibly five years of age, is a very short blue cashmere dress with pointed revers about the shoulders, trimmed with narrow white braid. From below the revers hangs a frill of white silk, the belt being of white silk also. This dress is made with the popular guimpe neck, and the waist has two box plaits in front, two at the back, and is plain at the sides.

Another finish for the guimpe neck would be narrow ruffles of plaid velvet ribbon. For the silk frills many people would substitute those of sheer white linen, as at once more distinctive and more juvenile.

For a girl of 16 is a dress, graceful in shape, but overtrimmed, of blue cashmere with blouse waist, and a



FOR CHRISTMAS PARTIES.

wise across her shoulder and hanging to the hem of her dress in red streamers.

Another, fresh from a convent school in Nice, has not returned to "pronounced American duds"—phrase dear to some tourists and travelers—but goes demure in straight black frock and white hat, like a proper little Frenchwoman. Yesterday this model so far relaxed as to treat her doll to a ride on her bicycle. "Piccina, piccina"—little one, little one—"sit still," she chattered to it—poor French, but good motherly advice and good Nice patois.

With the little Frenchwoman was the quaintest child in the neighborhood, like one of Mary E. Wilkins' old-fashioned New England maidens with small, serious face and plain, quiet-colored dresses that yet have something of the grace and picturesqueness of Kate Greenaway.

Some of the girls wear gymnasium suits—skirt and bloomers, occasionally divided skirts, like bicycle suits—to and from school, and these of all the youngsters have jolliest times.

I am always a little sorry for the girls of 12 or thereabouts, the freedom of the limbs is checked so suddenly. Twelve seems to mark the dividing line between the short dress, which, this winter, looks shorter than ever, and the longer gown, which apes grown-up dress in being longer than usual.

When I go out to Fifth avenue and see the school parade there I am sorer yet; the girls grow up so young and the little maidens who cannot sport the fine clothes, the watches and jewelry of the rest, or whose mothers refuse to turn them into young ladies, suffer so many pangs that are unnecessary.

It is not possible, though, to be melancholy over the pretty things that are making for the Christmas festivities. The season's changes in children's styles for promenade, church and party dresses are not marked, yet they follow the movement in grown-up gowns. Sleeves are smaller, skirts have less fullness and the circular flounce is as universal as elsewhere.

A little girl of ten who has a flock of cousins coming home from the far east is being made fine to meet them and

skirt made with a deep circular flounce, rounding up on the sides. A round yoke of black chiffon is finely plaited over blue silk, and is finished at the neck with a chiffon frill and a soft collar of black satin. A folded belt of the same satin circles the waist, while both skirt and blouse are trimmed with many rows of black passementerie, the skirt, in fact, being almost covered to the waistline. Similar decorations are used on the shoulder caps and sleeves.

Children's party dresses are sometimes silks in dainty stripes and rosebud patterns, sometimes of novelty goods in silk and wool, and sometimes of colored net, trimmed with narrow satin ribbons. Dance dresses for the tiny tots are made of taffeta and wash silks usually; but liberty wools, crepe de chine and light-colored cashmeres are also used.

For a Christmas party of very small children is a little gown of white china silk, accordion plaited, with a little empire over-bodice of white satin covered with lace, dotted here and there with silver spangles. Though not so universally employed as last season, there is enough tinsel, even on children's dresses, to make one glad, when the bills come in, that all that glitters is not gold.

A trifle more grown-up is a frock of white bengaline, trimmed with lace insertion and puffs of pink chiffon.

The handsomest coats for children are made of ribbed and plain velvets, bengelines and corded silks. Next to these come those of smooth-finished cloths, Venetian cloths and camel's hair. Even for the smallest sizes of these garments, the circular flounce is employed, just as for the richest of long coats for women. For quite young children a pretty design has a skirt and waist, with belt, sash and deep collar covered with trimming.

For the Christmas gathering of a dancing class is a dress of bright red net over red taffeta. The skirt, of length for a girl of 14, is finished at the bottom with three narrow ruffles of the net, and is circled higher up with graduated rows of red satin ribbon. The full blouse waist is cut square at the neck and edged with more ruffles. The sleeves come to the elbows. There is a sash of broad red satin ribbon.

ELLEN OSBORN.

## A PRESENT TO YOURSELF.

Give your wife a handsome dress,  
Give your boy a sled and skates,  
Give your girl a doll,  
They deserve them all;  
Fill up every shelf,  
Fill up every tray,  
But—  
Make a present to yourself  
Now on Christmas day,  
Man of great or little peff,  
Make a present to yourself.

Give yourself a better heart  
On an ampler plan,  
Full of blessedness and hope,  
Full of love to man,  
Give to Bob and Sue their part,  
Give to Dick and May.

Give yourself a better heart  
Now on Christmas day;  
Man of great or little peff,  
Make this present to yourself.

Give yourself a better soul,  
Tuned to higher strains  
Than the discords of the mart  
And inglorious gains,  
Give to such a generous dole,  
Bess and Tom and Ray.

Give yourself a better soul,  
Now on Christmas day;  
Man of great or little peff,  
Make this present to yourself.

Give yourself a better life,  
Fed from deeper springs,  
Fed from the eternal fount,  
Soul and source of things,  
Give to friend and child and wife  
All the gifts you may.

Give yourself a better life,  
Now on Christmas day;  
Man of great or little peff,  
Make this present to yourself.  
—Christian Endeavor World.

## Uncle Benjamin's Parrot

It was getting late in the evening of the third day before Christmas when there came a violent pull at our front doorbell, and on the door being opened Uncle Benjamin, covered with snow and out of breath from fighting against the wind, entered. "Oh, what weather! What weather!" he puffed and gasped, and he kicked off his wet overshoes and recklessly scattered the snow from his overcoat on the clothes which were hanging in the hall. "I should so like a cup of coffee. It wouldn't disturb you too much to make it, would it?"

Of course it didn't disturb us, no more did Uncle Benjamin, who was soon snugly installed in a comfortable seat by the stove.

"Oh, uncle, shut your eyes!" cried my wife, suddenly. "Your Christmas present is lying there on the table near you. How could I be so careless! Please don't look that way."

He did as requested—shut his kindly little eyes and waited patiently until my wife said: "Now, all right."

"How kind of you to think of a present for me," he said. "One good turn deserves another, and I want to give you something, too, but I'll be hanged if I know what."

For a short time he sat with his head in his hands looking fixedly in front of him. Then, all at once, bringing his fist down on the table he said: "If I only had that parrot I should be all right!"

"Parrot?" I asked, astonished.

"What parrot?"  
Uncle Benjamin looked at me jovially. "Don't you know the story? Really? Well, then, you shall hear it. But, first of all, give me another cup of coffee. You are a well-read man, nephew, so you ought to know there is nothing like a good cup of coffee and a good luncheon to get a man talking."

When the beverage was ready and Uncle Benjamin had thoroughly tasted it by several hearty draughts, and had then expressed his satisfaction, he began his story:

"It happened several years ago. After much hoping and waiting Christmas day had finally arrived. For several days before a continual stream of presents from relatives and friends had been steadily flowing in, while on Christmas morning quite a number of folks to whom I had scarcely given a thought sent me kindly remembrances, so that I felt proud and happy, and I said to myself: 'Benjamin, my boy, you must be rather a nice sort of a fellow, after all, if these people are so proud of you as to send you Christmas presents.' I had arranged with mother (for she was living then) how we would pile up all the presents under the Christmas tree in the evening—you know all reasonable people become children at Christmas—when another present was brought in. It was from a man whom I had not seen for years, and whom I had thought of very seldom—my friend Karl Kierbaum, who was in America. What in the world prompted him to send me anything I could not for the life of me imagine; still less how a man who was in general so reasonable should send me a parrot, the ugliest bird in creation. The one which I got was the ugliest of its kind, and was, in addition, an ill-tempered, ill-behaved beast. It began by biting my finger, and as soon as it was taken out of the cage set to work to destroy the carpet. You know I hate all birds—except those which are roasted, of course; then I like them well enough, when the gravy is all right. Well, how could I be expected to fall in love with that hateful specimen which screeched the sharpest words and behaved like a pagan? My wife naturally thought it a dear little thing and would have been delighted to have had it in the bedroom, just like children with their Christmas toys. But I insisted that the parrot should either be taken into the cellar, or else chained in the dog kennel. In the latter place it might at least have served to warn its lord and master of approaching danger—like the geese of the epistol. My wife objected that the parrot would freeze and that it would be brutal to cause the death of the poor, harmless creature. That I finally admitted, but maintained that it should not be housed in the bedroom.

"Well," said my wife, finally, "what shall we do?"

"Can't the bird be roasted?" I asked. "Upon which my dear better half threatened to lay the case before the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, so I saw that it would be necessary to find some other way out of the difficulty. At noon an inspiration came to me.

"Mother," I called, "I have it! We'll wrap the parrot up carefully in paper and send it to Director Striegel. I will write a note, telling him how honored I feel at being able to send him a trifling present, which I hope he will accept, as the bird is of a rare species. He will be sure to be flattered by the little attention, and we shall be able to get rid of the bird with credit, for to give, you know, is better than to receive."

"With tearful eyes my wife took leave of the 'dear, sweet, little parrot,' which had managed to break a vase before we could capture it. I comforted her by saying that she would be able to see the bird again when she called on the frau director. Then our maid Bertha set out with it, and half an hour later came back with a very nice note: 'My dear sir,' it ran, 'the acceptance of your kind present, just received, gives me the greatest pleasure. For a long time it has been my great desire to possess a parrot. I had not bought one because I never found one pretty enough for me. I never saw such a beauty as the one you have so kindly sent me, for which I hereby thank you most heartily.'

"So you see, mother," I said, "what is an owl to one is a nightingale to another."

"Christmas night arrived. It is always such a peculiar time. The older a man gets the more uncertain he feels whether it is going to bring him happiness or misfortune. Mother and I had exchanged presents and sat hand in hand in front of the sparkling Christmas fire. Neither of us spoke; we were both busy with our thoughts. At such times one wonders if it will be the last time that one will sit so; if not, perhaps a year later one or the other will be resting quietly under the sod.

"Our reverie was interrupted by a sharp ring at the bell, and almost immediately the servant entered the room, carrying a very strange-looking parcel and a note.

"Mr. Ibsen's compliments. He has sent you a Christmas present."

"I must confess I am curious to know what it can be," I said to my wife, who was busy taking the wrappers off. Then I opened the note and read: "Dear Benjamin, will you accept the accompanying trifling present? After a great deal of searching I finally unearthed the parrot which I am sending you. The dealer assures me that it is an exceptionally fine bird. I know that you are very fond of parrots, and hope you will be pleased to have this one."

"Confound it all!" I roared in a rage, "what the deuce do people mean by sending me parrots? What can I do with the bird? I'll tell you what. I'll send this over to the director just as it is in the cage. He'll be glad to have the pair. That's what I'll do!"

"So again I wrote a few words. The dealer from whom I had bought a parrot in the morning had by chance received a second and similar bird, which he had at once offered me. It gave me great pleasure to ask him to accept the parrot which I was sending him.

"Bertha went again and returned with the message that the director was so overjoyed with the present that he was absolutely unable to find words in which to express his thanks. He would call on me the following morning to return thanks in person.

"Then we sat down to the table. I was so happy and so merry. The greatest happiness consists in making others happy, and that joy was mine. And as Bertha cleared the table she related again and again, to my great satisfaction, how overcome with joy the director had seemed.

"Another hour passed—it must have been close upon nine—when the door opened and my friend Ibsen entered, with a cage in his hand.

"Why, Ibsen, what makes you call so late?" I asked, astonished.

"Well," said he, after he had greeted my wife, "the fact is, I am sorry to disturb you, but the dealer from whom I bought the parrot this morning has just sent me a second similar one, and I am so glad to be able to give you a little pleasant surprise that I brought it myself."

"Deeply moved, I gave him my hand. 'You are really very kind,' I said. 'How have I merited such attention?'

"Oh, don't mention it," he said. "But let us put both parrots in the same cage. I am curious to see how they will behave."

"So am I," I answered, and then, embarrassed, added: "You know I have had a curious experience with the first parrot you sent me?"

"Why, how so?" asked Ibsen, astonished.

"Well, I had to make some present to our director, and I thought you wouldn't take it amiss, so I sent him the parrot."

"Ibsen was astonished. 'What a contemptible thing to do!'

"How contemptible?"

"Why," he replied, in turn embarrassed, "I myself received the first parrot from the director, and I sent it to you because I thought you would like it."

"And the second?" I asked, eagerly.

"Why, I got that from the director, too. But what's amiss with you?"

"I sank down, quite overcome. The poor parrot—twice had I received it as a present, had twice given it away, and now for the third time it was there before me in all its glory. But there was one good thing about the whole affair. In being sent about it had caught cold, and in less than a week it was dead. I am sorry now, because I could have given it to you. I think I have one of its wings left, which would do to put into a hat."—From the German of Baron von Schlicher, in Boston Budget.

... A New System of ...

# Weights and Measures.

In All Probability Congress Will Enact Legislation Adopting the Metric System During the Present Session.

—Copyright, 1898.

At the present session of congress there will be passed, it is now practically assured, a measure that has been quietly yet surely winning its way through long years. With hardly a doubt the metric system, debated in these halls for a quarter of a century and taken up now by nearly every other country, will be formally adopted by the United States. In the touch and go of more spectacular matters little has been heard of this proposition. The fight for it, however, has been none the less active. How far the battle has progressed may be judged from the fact that in the last session a bill for its establishing was defeated by but three votes.

Not the last vestiges of opposition, perhaps, but enough to make the passing of such a measure possible have been overcome by now. Unless the unforeseen happens the metric system will be the established system for weights and measures in America within a few months. Thus will be ended a campaign that started just after the close of the civil war. When the hour of adoption arrives Great Britain and Russia will be the only great nations in the world that still hold on to their historic measuring and weighing. And Great Britain only stands aloof in part, for the metric system has been adopted in British India, and it is legalized in England itself, the curious inconsistency being that British tradesmen are not permitted to keep metric weights and measures in their shops, nor merchants to use them in actual commerce.

In the United States, since in 1866, practically the same state of affairs prevails. The metric system was in that year legalized and could even now lawfully be used. Save in certain of the sciences, however, it is an unknown system. What the new bill proposes is the abolishment, at a single sweep, sufficient time being allowed for adjustment, of course, of all the historic old measures and weights, many of which are curious survivals, many of which differ in different sections and states, just as they do in the counties of England. In fact not a few, the bulk, were imported directly from England, and continue in force there.

It is for the sake of uniformity and the simplifying of transactions between American and abroad and between the various sections of the country as well that the adoption of this decimal system has been urged. Weight is lent to the argument when it is stated that the metric system has already been adopted by more than half the civilized and Christian world. Very nearly 500,000,000 people are using it, even semibarbaric Turkey having fallen into line. On the continent of Europe the thousand and one quaint and complicated systems, distinct for very nearly every section and city, handed down from feudal times, have all been superseded to the great betterment of commerce.

Not to hark back too greatly into ancient history, the metric system was devised, strangely enough, in the first white heat of the turmoil of the French revolution. How amid these scenes scientists found time and opportunity to work out such a plan is not recorded, but at all events, on August 1, 1793, the metric system was established in France and the French possessions. Nor did the bloodshed of the years that followed, the changing of the map of Europe by Napoleon I., the making and the unmaking of a great empire shake it. By 1830 the system was in use in Holland and Belgium as well; in 1833 the early confederation of German states adopted it and in 1836 Greece.

When the question of a new and uniform system of weights and measures was being talked of in France, Prince Talleyrand suggested the length of the pendulum beating seconds in latitude 45 degrees as the unit of length. It was seen that there must be some scientific measure that could not be lost. The old measures of length, raised and curious, had been taken from the length of the forearm, the breadth of the thumb, an average step or pace, three barley corns round and dry, laid end to end. These, absurd as they appear as accurate measures, are yet in use as the basis of the foot and inch and mile as used in England and America to-day, and formerly in vogue all over the continent.

Prince Talleyrand's proposition was never adopted. The scientists of that era found what they thought a better plan. They chose as the linear unit one ten-millionth of the quadrant of a terrestrial meridian. Seven years were employed in getting the precise length of this, the meter, and this was found to be the present 39.37012 inches.

Text books and works of reference abound that give the metric system in full detail, and it need not, therefore, be further touched upon here. Far more interesting is some account of what is not the metric system, the weights and measures still in use in England and America, especially in England, their strange absurdities and odd inconsistencies.

England still clings, with her historic conservatism, to her established systems, one county and one shire frequently differing greatly from that immediately adjoining. Weights and measures in existence for hundreds of years yet continue. The British inch of three barleycorns ranged end to end, as mentioned above, still prevails in

certain places. This has come down from 1324.

In this country just as marked curiosities and barbarisms prevail. There are, for example, 32 gallons in a barrel of cider, 31½ or 36 in a barrel of ale or milk, 30 in a barrel of fish, 42 in a tierce of wine or oil, 63 in a hogshead of wine, 54 in a hogshead of beer, 84 in a puncheon of wine. John Quincy Adams, so long ago as the early days of this century (and the same is true to-day in both England and America), remarked: "The English pound avoirdupois is heavier than the pound Troy, the ounce avoirdupois is lighter than the ounce Troy."

In such measures 112 comes to mean 100, one dozen 16 and 28 signifies 25.

And these are but the beginnings of the odd inconsistencies. It has been calculated that there are six different legal quarts in various parts of Great Britain. Experts say that in Lancashire, England, there are nearly 80 different bushels. There are 80 to 100 different units of weights alone in the United States, the most of them hardly known outside of their own special localities, it is true, but all distinctly legal.

This brief list, carefully prepared, will give some conception of the confusion. In actual use to-day is the kilderkin. Generally, it is a half barrel of ale. At the United States customs kilderkin means 19 gallons. It is a British beer measure of 22 gallons, and in the measuring of water for ships it is calculated at 18 gallons.

The dry barrel is 11 pecks, the liquid barrel 43 1-5 gallons. But mark the variance in this latter. For wine the United States measure is 31½ gallons per barrel, the British 26.24 gallons, and for various wines this British barrel measure runs from 30 to 36 gallons. For beer in the United States the measure is 36 gallons (two kilderkin by this calculation), in England 29.94 gallons. The coom still exists, the old English measure of four barrels. There is the quarter—dry, a quarter of a peck; liquid, a quarter of a yard. The step is 30 inches. The nail is yet legal. It is one-twentieth of an English ell, about one-sixteenth of a yard, approximately, the distance from the end of the thumb nail to the joint at the base of the thumb.

Quaint instances of barbaric measures yet in use may readily be continued. The pace is 60 inches. There is the last, ten quarters, in England 80 bushels, in Russia 11.54 quarters. The load in both England and America is calculated at 40 cubic feet of round timber, 50 of hewn or squared timber or planks. When it comes to fractions of weights the avoirdupois, apothecaries and Troy measures show the same weight of the grain, the avoirdupois the ounce less, but the pound one-fifth greater, the apothecaries and the Troy the ounce and the pound alike.

Five distinct gallons exist in the British empire, one of 231 cubic inches, one of 224, one of 272½. In some sections of England the old rhyme yet runs:

"Weights a pound and a quarter  
A pint of pure water,"  
and in others is heard (it being the case there),

"A pint's a pound  
All the world round."

There is one acre in London and the regions surrounding it, and quite another when the traveler gets to York, far up north. England has yet other acres incorrect, but not illegal.

Thirteen for a dozen is quite common in many parts of England, and in the British currency a guinea (21 shillings) replaces the pound (20 shillings) in professional fees—in accordance with the tradition. Even more curious is a method of counting jugs and pitchers in the wholesale crockery trade. The sizes in which these are made are known as 54s, 42s, 36s, 30s, 24s, 12s, 6s and 4s, the smallest articles having the larger numbers. These are sold according to the numbers—54 to the dozen of 54s, but four only to the dozen of 4s.

## Don't Hide Close Together.

A common cause of accidents to amateur riders is their inclination to ride close together when on separate wheels. If one is behind the other, each naturally feels that all is well so long as the leader proceeds smoothly. This confidence leads to forgetfulness, and if the head rider has a mishap at least the two next to him are likely to share the misfortune because of their close proximity and the fact that they are not on their guard. If the leader turns aside sharply to escape an obstacle those closely following it will be sure to encounter it. They have neither the time nor the presence of mind to do otherwise. It is estimated that quite one-half of the accidents to young wheelmen are occasioned in this way, and out of this class bicycle repairs always coin money. The slightest thing is liable to dislodge one when coasting, for at such times a rider has less perfect control of the machine than when his feet touch the pedals.

## Oysters Know the Tide.

Oysters, after they have been brought away from the sea, know by instinct the exact hour when the tide is rising and approaching their beds, and so, of their own accord, open their shells to receive their food from the sea as if they were still at home.