

IN THE HOUSEHOLD.

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Papers on Housekeeping.

Bread—"The Staff of Life."

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NO conscientious housekeeper should be contented until her household is furnished with the very best bread her circumstances will permit. Much of the bread one finds in hotels, boarding houses and private families to-day, if not always positively bad bread, can be called, at best, only fair; and, indeed, too often what is intended to be the "staff of life" resembles more nearly the "spear of death." But in these days of improved milling processes and compressed yeast there is seldom any excuse for poor bread.

It is said that a decided improvement in bread-making in some parts of America dates from the Centennial Exposition, where Vienna bread was exhibited and Vienna methods demonstrated.

Let us consider briefly materials and methods necessary for good plain bread.

MATERIALS.—The best bread requires only good flour, good yeast, sweet milk or water, or both, and salt. French bread is mixed with water alone. Vienna bread is mixed with milk and water in equal proportions, and several varieties of bread are mixed with milk alone. Bread mixed with water alone is tougher and sweeter, and will keep moist longer than bread mixed with milk and water or with milk alone.

Comparatively good bread can be made with liquid yeast or even with dry yeast cakes, if fresh and sweet, but the best quality of bread can be made only with compressed yeast.

Some say that as long as compressed yeast remains firm and has an alcoholic smell it can be depended upon to give better results than dry yeast cakes or liquid yeast. But the fresher it can be had the better it is for bread-making, and in localities where it is readily attainable housekeepers should always get it as fresh as possible.

For the benefit of those who cannot get the compressed yeast I will give a rule from one of the newest cook books for making good liquid yeast, which is said to have been thoroughly tested.

LIQUID YEAST.—Steep an eighth of an ounce of pressed, or a small handful of loose, hops in a quart of boiling water for about five minutes. Strain the boiling infusion upon half a pint of flour, stirred to a smooth paste with a little cold water, mix well, let boil a minute, add a tablespoonful of salt, two tablespoonfuls of white sugar, set aside till lukewarm, then stir in two half-ounce cakes of compressed yeast dissolved in two tablespoonfuls of cold water, or a gill of good liquid yeast. Let stand twenty-four hours, stirring occasionally, cover closely and set in a cool place.

Freezing or intense heat will kill the yeast plant. Yeast made according to this method will keep sweet two or three weeks and can be used any time during that period for mixing bread or for starting a fresh supply of yeast. Reserve a portion for the next rising in a small jar by itself, as opening the jar often causes the yeast to lose its strength. Always shake or stir well before using. Yeast is good when it is foamy or full of beads, has a brisk pungent odor and a good deal of snap or vim. It is poor when it has an acid odor and looks watery, or has a thin film over the top.

With good flour potatoes in bread are unnecessary, and the use of them increases the labor of making bread.

A difference of opinion exists about the use of any shortening in bread. If used in more than very small quantities it certainly interferes with

the action of the yeast. But some claim that a very little is useful to make the bread less tough, and therefore more easily penetrated by the digestive fluids. Those who use shortening probably know that butter tastes best, drippings are cheapest and that lard makes whiter bread than either of the others. The shortening may be rubbed into the flour, but it is better to melt it in the warmed wetting. Rolls, rusks and buns which are usually shortened more than loaf bread should have the butter added at the last kneading.

Some bread makers approve of using sugar in bread, though in very small quantities, giving as the reason for its use that flour in its natural state contains sugar which is changed in fermentation, therefore they would use just enough sugar to restore the natural sweetness, but not enough to give a really sweet taste. Other bread makers contend that sugar destroys the fine flavor of good flour.

FLOUR.—There are many tests for flour, but the surest test is to buy a small quantity at first and make it into dough; then, if satisfactory, purchase whatever amount is required, and buy this same brand as long as it proves of uniform quality. The same brand may vary in quality from year to year. If it feels damp, clammy or sticky and gradually forms into lumps or cakes, it is not the best. Good flour holds together in a mass when squeezed by the hand, and retains the impression of the fingers and even the marks of the skin much longer than poor flour.

I believe there is no valid reason why fine white flour as made to-day by the newest processes is not the best for family use. Graham flour is generally acknowledged to consist, in many cases, of poor flour mixed with bran, and any flour containing much of the indigestible bran causes irritation of the digestive organs; all the food is hurried through the alimentary canal before digestion is complete or all the nutriment can be absorbed, and thus is neither economical nor healthful. Graham flour should, therefore, be sifted for ordinary purposes.

The finest white flours contain all the best elements of the wheat berry without any admixture of pulverized wood-fibre and bran coating, and, all things considered, the very finest patent flour holds the leading place both hygienically and economically among cereal foods or grain products.

The best approved methods of bread making will be given in the next article on this subject, which will contain recipes for Vienna bread and quick process bread, and show cuts of a new kneading board and a new bread pan.

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ABOUT THE POTATO.

The potato should be treated as carefully as many higher-priced vegetables. It has many varieties. Some potatoes need to be boiled quickly, others slowly, some with plenty of water, others with a little; some are best baked, some steamed. It has been said with truth that "the boiling of a potato is the test of a good cook."

Every land has its favorite mode of cooking this vegetable. The French excel in the art of frying potatoes; in the boiling of them there is none so clever as the Irish woman. For a roasted potato an English hearth takes the prize.

It is said that more nutriment is gained from potatoes when they are cooked with their skins on, that a greater amount of potash and other salts will be found in them than if they had been pared before cooking. If potatoes are old and withered, put them to cook in cold water, but if fresh and firm, let them be cooked in boiling salted water. Boil potatoes steadily, but not rapidly, so the outside surface will break and give them a rough appearance when they are to be served as a plain boiled potato.

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To bake creamed potatoes:

Put over the fire in a saucepan a generous half spoonful of butter and stir into it one tablespoon-

ful of flour. Gradually add half a cup of well-seasoned white stock and three-quarters of a cup of cream or rich milk and season with salt and pepper. Meanwhile cut one pound of boiled potatoes into slices or cubes, and stir them carefully into the creamed dressing. Butter a shallow baking dish and put in the prepared potatoes, cover the top with a layer of grated cheese and sprinkle some stale bread crumbs over the whole. Bake in a hot oven about ten minutes or long enough to brown the crumbs and melt the cheese.

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For lyonnaise potatoes:

Place a spider over the fire containing two level tablespoonfuls of butter. When it is melted stir in a heaping teaspoonful of chopped onion and let it cook until slightly colored before adding two cupfuls of cold boiled potatoes cut in cubes. Lightly toss the potatoes until they have absorbed the butter and taken on some color. Sprinkle the potatoes with salt and pepper, and some chopped parsley. Serve very hot. The juice of part of a lemon may be used in place of the parsley.

A nice way to serve potatoes for a dinner is as follows: Take one quart of mashed potatoes, and two tablespoonfuls of cream, and beat until light. Stir in two beaten eggs and season with pepper and salt and two tablespoonfuls of chopped parsley. Thickly butter the inside of a basin or plain mould, cut a cooked carrot into slices, and then in some fancy shapes, as diamonds, rings, or circles. Arrange them around the mould, and sprinkle the rest of the mould with sifted stale bread crumbs. Fill the mould with the prepared potatoes, place in a hot oven, and bake until they are a nice brown. Let the mould stand a few moments after it is taken from the oven before turning the potatoes out upon a hot dish to serve.

Scalloped potatoes may be made with raw or cold boiled potatoes:

When using raw potatoes slice them very thin and put a layer in the bottom of a well-buttered earthen baking dish. Dredge the potatoes lightly with flour and sprinkle with salt and pepper and bits of butter. Continue this until the dish is filled nearly to the top; then turn in all the milk the dish will hold, cover with a plate, place in a moderate oven and bake about an hour and a half, or until the potatoes are thoroughly cooked. Remove the cover the last twenty minutes and allow the top to brown. When using cold boiled potatoes prepare them in a dish as the raw ones are prepared; turn over them a generous cup of cream or rich milk and cover the top with fine bread crumbs or cracker dust. Place in a rather brisk oven and bake for about half an hour. Scalloped potatoes may be flavored with a little onion juice or chopped parsley if desired.

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Flour is one of the cooking materials that frequently receives no thought as to where it shall be kept. Many houses are not provided with a store closet, and a barrel of flour is put in a corner of the kitchen, behind an outside door "to have it out of the way and not fill up the pantry." Dampness affects flour, making it close and heavy; besides, flour will absorb the odor of many things as quickly as butter; so if one wishes to be sure of good and light bread and cakes one of the first things to do is to "fill up the pantry." Make feet of four small pieces of wood for the barrel to stand upon, thus allowing the air to circulate around all parts of the barrel.

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Cauliflower Salad.

SOAK, trim and boil the cauliflower. Drain very dry and set away till quite cold. Pick the flowers apart and cut the stalks into slices, keeping them by themselves. Mix with the stalks one tablespoonful of finely chopped parsley and the same quantity of onion to one quart of the cauliflower. Arrange in a deep salad bowl with the flowers on top, pour over a boiled salad dressing and garnish with overlapping slices of lemon and a few sprigs of parsley.