

## WHAT TO COOK, AND HOW TO COOK IT.

## PART VI.

THE STAFF OF LIFE. SOME CAKES AND A FEW BISCUITS.



THE making of bread—or the care of it—comes as part of the daily routine of every-day life, it is literally daily bread. We have to consider not merely its manner of making and baking, but the kind of bread which best

proves our staff of life. Undoubtedly the fine white bread on the baker's shelf, especially that which has been baked in a tin, is not this; the best constituents of the flour have been eliminated that appearances, or that taste which approves the appearance of whiteness, may be satisfied.

The flour for making a white loaf that shall be wholesome while yet it is white, should be of a yellowish tinge, rather granulated, and one that does not hold together. This makes a strong and elastic dough. The most wholesome flour for family use is undoubtedly pure wholemeal, but if thought too brown it may be mixed with an equal quantity of white flour.

Of the brands of patent wholemeal bread with which we are all familiar there is much to be said in praise. Malt and cereals of different kinds are included with the wholemeal flour, all of which are nutritious; this kind of bread cannot be so well made at home.

Next to the importance of carefully choosing flour, and purchasing it from a miller, not from a baker, comes the selection of a reliable brand of yeast, German in preference to brewers' harm. It must be perfectly sweet even if not perfectly fresh, although freshness is a desideratum likewise. There are many makes of German yeast but few that surpass the "D. C. L." brand.

Sweetness and lightness, but not puffiness, are the points to achieve in making a good loaf; a fairly quick oven is essential too; it is well to test the heat by a thermometer. For square or round quarter or half-quarter loaves 360° Fah. would be right; for fancy bread, rolls, or long French loaves and cakes about 400°.

If milk is used for mixing the dough it should be first scalded then cooled; if milk and water, pour boiling water into the milk; if water only boil it first, then use it when it has cooled to the right temperature.

To set the "sponge" is the first proceeding after the flour is weighed out and a "well" has been made in the centre. Two ounces of good yeast will be sufficient to raise six pounds of flour; make a thick cream of the yeast first by mixing it with warm milk and water; a teaspoonful of sugar is useful at this stage. Set the yeast at the back of the stove to rise for a few minutes. As soon as it is properly working mix it with enough of the flour in the "well" to make a thick batter, then leave to rise again for about ten minutes. By this time the mixing and kneading of the whole mass may be begun. Kneading is the most important part of the whole process of bread-making. In large bakeries this is done by machinery and done far better than by hand; perhaps we may yet see the same or a similar invention brought out on a scale small enough to make it practicable for a family baking.

The right consistency of the dough is only obtained by practice, but when the kneading process is finished the ball should be firm

and elastic, not sticking to the hands or to the pan.

Cover with a soft cloth and set to rise in a temperate place, free from draughts. The bread which is put to rise at eight o'clock in the morning ought to be ready for the oven by twelve. It should by then be about double its original bulk. If it becomes over light it will ferment, and the bread will be sour. For this reason it is not advisable in small households to knead the dough over night; the long, even if slow rising will take the nourishment and sweetness from the flour.

Salt is best added with the water or milk, as it becomes more evenly distributed by this means. Wholemeal flour will take rather more yeast, more salt, and more water than white flour; it must be more lightly handled also and baked quickly at first, afterwards slowly.

Do not knead the dough again a second time when on the rolling board, but shape it to the form required; place in greased tins or on well-floured baking-sheets and put in the oven at once.

A fair sized loaf of either brown or white bread—say of two or three pounds weight—will take the best part of an hour's baking.

For fancy bread take a small quantity of flour, say two pounds, and add to it an ounce of yeast mixed to a cream, an ounce of dissolved butter, the whole of an egg lightly beaten and sufficient warm salted milk to make a soft dough. Beat rather than knead this, until it is full of air. Let it rise, then take off small pieces of the dough, pull or shape them as desired, brush over with milk or dissolved lard, and bake in a very quick oven to a decided brown.

Bread-sticks or pieces of light dough pulled out very thin and brushed over with water, are preferred by those who suffer much from indigestion and are unable to take bread in the ordinary form.

When buttermilk is used for mixing bread it is well to add a little soda to it, and use baking-powder in preference to yeast.

Some of the best of our modern cooks are not advocates for much cake-making at home. Except for the plainer kinds such as lunch, seed, or rice cakes, it too often means a conglomeration of rich stuffs that are harmful rather than beneficial, and costly into the bargain.

With so many substitutes for butter and eggs one is naturally mistrustful as to the composition of factory-made cakes, yet as far as lightness and good baking is concerned these are more to be depended upon. There is no cake so wholesome as that which is made from a portion of the bread dough, to which good stoned raisins, shred peel and sugar with a small but sufficient quantity of wholesome dripping or butter have been added and worked in. This, when well-baked, will harm no one, and it may benefit many.

For afternoon tea, small cakes approaching the biscuit order are always better liked: for an invalid or for a children's festivity a home-made rice cake is excellent.

A Hungarian tea loaf is another of the "sweet and light" sort that deserves high recommendation, and then we have crisp biscuits that are the delight of all. Let us specialise on a few of these.

A word first as to the order that should be followed in the mixing of a cake, as upon the right way of mixing success will depend.

Briefly then—

1. Beat together the butter and sugar until they make a cream.
2. Add the well whisked eggs.
3. Add the flour gradually, beating all the time.

4. Add fruit or whatever flavouring is given to the cake.

When baking-powder is put in it must be rubbed into the flour; if soda, it should be dissolved in lemon juice or milk and stirred in last.

The oven door should not be opened too frequently after the cake has been put in; and if either top or bottom heat seems too fierce shield with paper or an inverted tin.

*American Stars* are pretty and wholesome little cakes for afternoon tea. Beat together a quarter of a pound of castor sugar and the same weight of butter, then add the whisked yolks of four eggs with a teaspoonful of grated lemon rind, and half a wineglassful of orange flower water. Beat in six ounces of dried and sifted flour, and lastly stir in briskly the whisked whites of the eggs; beat all together for ten minutes, then pour into an inch deep baking tin that has been previously greased, let the mixture three parts fill it. Bake rather quickly to a pale brown, when done cut into stars or diamonds and ice the top of each with pink or white soft sugar icing.

*Almond Biscuits.*—Half a pound of pounded loaf sugar, half a pound of sifted flour and half a pound of fresh butter, two ounces of ground almonds and a few drops of essence, with two yolks of eggs.

Rub the flour, butter, sugar and almonds together first, then mix with the eggs into which the essence has been put. Make into a stiff paste and roll out on a floured board into a thin sheet, stamp out and lay on a baking tin and bake in a rather slow oven to a pale brown.

*Cocoanut Macaroons.*—Mix together a quarter of a pound of desiccated cocoanut and the same weight of powdered sugar, make into a paste with the whites of four well-whisked eggs and a few drops of fresh lemon juice. Drop in small pieces on to a buttered tin and bake in a brisk oven for twenty minutes. When cold store them in an air-tight canister.

For those who are fond of the nut *Chestnut Comes* will be a welcome dainty.

Boil, peel and pound half a pound of chestnuts, add three ounces of flour, two ounces of dissolved butter and two beaten eggs, a drop of vanilla essence if liked; roll into the shape of walnuts, brush them over with beaten egg, and bake in a quick oven to a good rich brown. Let them cool on a sieve.

The following is an excellent recipe for a superlative *Rice Cake*.

Rub together four ounces of dried flour and eight ounces of rice flour. Beat together to a cream eight ounces of butter, eight ounces of castor sugar and the juice of half a fresh lemon with the rind grated. Add the eggs to the butter after whisking the whites and yolks separately; beat in by degrees the flour, then at the last stir in half a teaspoonful of soda dissolved in a tablespoonful of milk; beat all briskly together for ten minutes, then pour into a mould that is lined with buttered paper, and bake in an oven that is not too hot for upwards of an hour. Rest the cake carefully on end or on a sieve to cool.

Stale bread and cakes may be made quite fresh again by gradually heating them through in a moderate oven. If the bread is very dry outside brush it over with water or milk before putting into the oven.

A folded linen cloth is better to lay over bread than a tight-fitting cover.

Finally, do not waste bread, for all crusts and scraps can be baked dry and crushed to a powder for raspings; and the better pieces of bread will make puddings, and if pulled and baked will eat with cheese.

L. H. YATES.