

any reader may take those that are handy down from the shelves himself and consult them. The national library proper is contained in a great oblong building, which encloses the reading-room all round; and in order to get a book from this collection it is necessary to make a formal application to the assistants. The catalogue is contained on shelves under the two outer concentric tables in the middle of the room, and each of the large MS. volumes composing it bears the surnames of the authors whose works it comprises. Indeed, the catalogue of the British Museum Library clearly demonstrates that one cannot mention a surname which does not count an author to its credit or discredit. If a man wishes to feel proud of his patronymic, he has only to examine the inscriptions on this roll of forgotten fame.

To obtain a book, therefore, it is necessary to know the name of the author, and to turn up the catalogue until its proper description is found. It is then necessary to fill up a printed form of request, transcribing on it from the catalogue all the particulars necessary for the assistant to identify the work wanted. The particulars are, for example:—

Name of Author, or other Heading of Work wanted—T. Nichols.
 Title—A Handy Book of the British Museum for Every-day Readers.*
 Press-mark—7702, b. 9.
 Place—London.
 Date—1870.
 Size—8vo.
 Date. Signature. Number of Reader's seat.

This form, so filled up, is left by the reader in one of the three flat baskets which stand on the innermost or superintendent's counter. He can then return to his seat, where the work in demand will be brought to him by an assistant in course of time, say fifteen or twenty minutes.

When the reader has done with a book from the reference library he must return it to the place from

which he took it, and when it is from the principal library he must present it at the ticket box which comprises the initial letter of his surname: for example, if his name begins with M, at the middle box, which includes names from H to O. The attendant receives the book and returns to him the request form which he left in order to get it. The form is cancelled and will not serve for another day, unless a special arrangement is made with the attendant about keeping the book laid out, to save time on the next occasion the reader will require it. So long as the ticket is uncanceled the reader is responsible for the book.

The reading seats radiate between the central tables and the walls in double rows, seven seats in a row. Each division of seats is marked by a distinctive letter of the alphabet, and each seat in the division is numbered. A comfortable stuff-bottomed chair, a hat-rack, and foot-bar are provided for each reader, together with two pens, one of quill and one of steel, an ink-bottle, and a wiper. The writing-table which runs in front of the seats is covered with thick patent leather, and on it lies a blotting-book and paper-knife for individual use. On the reader's right hand a shelf folds down for the purpose of holding his extra volumes, and on his left a soft padded bookholder opens out at any angle most convenient to his taste or posture in the chair. The floor of the room is carpeted with some noiseless material, and a strict silence is observed, so that altogether it would be difficult to study under more favourable conditions than are to be found any day at the British Museum. Jablochhoff's electric light was tried during last winter for a short time, to determine whether the room could not be kept open till eight or nine o'clock every night; and we believe it is in contemplation to test next winter a new system of electric illumination, with a view to extending the winter hours of reading, at least beyond four o'clock in the afternoon.

HOW WE MADE BREAD AT HOME.



a kind friend's offer to occupy for a time a small house only twenty miles from London, but three from the

WHEN we first married, my husband and myself lived with his father in a luxurious London home, where the question of expense was hardly thought of, and the enjoyment of all that money could buy came as a matter of course. But circumstances arose under which we gladly availed ourselves of

nearest town and railway station, entailing a long daily walk on my husband and many small difficulties in housekeeping for me.

The owners of Burne Cottage had been in the habit of running down to it from Saturday to Monday in the summer and living there in a sort of picnic fashion, being waited on by an old servant and her husband who lived rent free, and cultivated the garden for their own profit, selling to their employers such vegetables as were wanted, at market prices. We adopted the same plan, and the husband being old and infirm, Mrs. Medger would have had rather more than she could manage, had I not assisted her to the best of my abilities, which in truth were very small. I could paint dainty china, sing, act charades, and design dados and doyleys, but of ordinary domestic work I knew absolutely nothing. I had to begin at the very beginning, and I could hardly have found a more patient teacher.

* Published by Messrs. Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co.

It was about a week after our arrival that I set about mastering the mystery of bread-making.

When I entered the kitchen I found all the paraphernalia ready, viz., a large red pan, a hair-sieve, some strong spoons, and a few tins.

"Will that pan hold enough for our week's consumption, Mrs. Medger? I thought bread was made in a large wooden trough."

"Well, ma'am, some people have a wooden kneading trough, but I find a pan is just as good if it's large enough to knead in well, without letting the flour drop about, and the dough has room to rise. Never fear but that pan will hold all we want. I reckon half a bushel of flour for five people will last a week. Though bakers' bread is stale on the third day, it's your own fault if home-made isn't good and tasty at the week's end. So would the bakers' be, if they made it of the same materials. All you have to do is to keep it in a cool, moist place, on the stones if you will, or in a well-covered pan. Really stale bread can be made to taste fresh if moistened with milk and put in the oven to warm up, but it must be soon eaten. Bless me! I do wonder that gentlefolks don't oftener have their bread made in their own kitchens; it's twice as wholesome, sweet, and clean, and for sure it's easy enough."

"I am afraid our London cooks would say they hadn't the time," I suggest.

"More shame for 'em then. If it interferes with their late dinner, let them do it in the morning."

"But you see there's another difficulty—the oven."

"That need be no difficulty. I like a brick oven best, and always feel glad we've one in the back 'us there; but most kitchen ovens will bake a few loaves if wanted, care being taken that the oven and the flues are all clean. It's best to put the bread on tins, and if the bottoms get burnt, to set the tins on a couple of bricks. I heat our oven with wooden fagots, a deal cheaper than the coals required for an iron one, which makes the use of one so expensive."

"How do you know when your oven's the right heat?"

"Practice makes perfect, and I can tell pretty quick, but they do say it's hot enough when you can keep your hand in and count twenty. You must be sure and clean it out well before putting the bread in, and you should keep the door shut for half an hour first."

"It sounds easy enough, Mrs. Medger, as you explain the process, but I remember when we were travelling about last year on a fishing expedition, we had at one or two farm-houses some very nasty bread—sour, dry, and heavy."

"That's because people don't give themselves proper trouble, and are not clean enough. Everything ought to be as clean as a new pin—hands, pans, spoons, and all—and when you've begun you must go on with it. If you leave the dough in the middle of kneading the bread will be heavy, or if you let it over-work it will be sour; and then you must have good materials, first and foremost good flour. I always have mine direct from the miller, and I don't hold with having such very white stuff. Household flour is what I get—seconds, as some people call it; the bread's

better-tasting, but not so white. Anyhow there's more nourishment in it."

"Brown bread do you mean?"

"Oh no, ma'am, not that; indeed a deal of brown bread is often made only of ordinary flour with a handful of bran in it. Good brown bread should be made of whole meal, or with a little oatmeal, barley, or rye, and be kneaded more than the white. There's a great deal in keeping the flour dry. You see I've put what we are going to use in front of the fire; it's been there for an hour or so, for it's better for it to feel warm and dry. It ought to be ground a week or two before you use it."

"You have some brewers' yeast, I see."

"Yes; they bring it me from Brantbury every week in the summer, but I can make it keep good three weeks in the winter, in cold water, changing the water every day. The great point is to have it fresh and sweet, or the bread is sour; and if too thin the loaf is unwholesome; in this case a tea-spoonful of honey or brown sugar will strengthen it. Yeast tastes bitter when it first comes; it must be washed with cold water and all the water taken off the top; the fresher it is, the sooner the bread rises. If it is still bitter, pop a red-hot coal in it; but never mix warm water with it, for that makes the bread sour."

"Can you always get yeast here?"

"Most times. I'm forced on occasions to use the German yeast, but I'd far liefer have the other. The German ought to look white and be quite dry, and you must be sure that it is quite fresh and sweet. You put one and a half ounces in a little cold water, and then stir in three and a half pints of tepid water, or milk and water; but it takes longer to rise than brewers' yeast. Some people make yeast with hops and bran, but it requires a little of the other yeast to mix with it, so I do not see much use in it. There's a new way I've heard of—mixing half an ounce of carbonate of soda and half an ounce of muriatic acid with every three pounds of the flour instead of yeast; and some people use the baking-powder, nine kitchen-spoonfuls to three pounds of flour. The bread made with it must be done off quickly, and only a few loaves at a time."

"I'm all anxiety to begin."

"And so you shall, ma'am, and I know you want to do it all yourself. Here's the flour then."

I had divested myself of cuffs, my sleeves were turned up above the elbows, and I was wearing a holland apron made originally for lawn tennis. Standing in front of the large pan, I put in the best part of the flour as Mrs. Medger handed it to me.

"Keep it well heaped up round the sides, and leave a hole in the middle. That'll do beautifully. Now I'll pour in the quart of water and yeast by degrees in the centre. Don't be afraid, ma'am; stir it well up with the spoon while I put in the rest of the flour. This large tea-spoonful of salt must be sprinkled outside; if stirred in it sometimes delays the rising. It would taste all the better for a pinch of sugar and a little milk with the water, but we will do without either to-day. You've got it to a nice batter. The kitchen's warm, though it's cold enough outside,

so it'll rise all the better. We'll leave the spoon standing up in the middle. Just sprinkle half a handful of flour on the top, and I'll lift it near the fire—not in front, or it will be too hot, though it isn't much of a fire, for we've a cold dinner to-day, but it mustn't get too heated on any account. We will leave it with this large cloth I've doubled four times over the top."

"Do you think it's sure to rise? I may not have mixed it rightly."

"Never fear, that will rise fast enough; if it don't I should have to add a little more yeast, or pulp some raw potato into it, placing it a little nearer the fire, and some people set the pan over boiling water. But I am not likely to have that job to-day. It's beautiful fresh yeast. And it's well to remember, ma'am, that you want a pint of barm, as they call yeast in my country, to a bushel of flour. Now you will have plenty of time to write the letter you wanted. I will let you know when it's time to knead."

In about half an hour I was called again into the kitchen. There were plenty of bubbles to be seen and the yeast had worked most satisfactorily, for the dough had risen to the top of the spoon.

The pan was lifted on to the dresser, and a little warm water stirred in, and well flouring my hands and arms I began the process of kneading, as I was duly instructed to do with both fists, and which I at first found hard work. When, with Mrs. Medger's assistance, it was thoroughly done, we covered it again with a cloth, and left it for an hour and a half to rise for the second time, while the oven was preparing. Then turning the dough on to the well-floured board, we proceeded to cut it up with a sharp knife into loaves. I always provided my husband with sandwiches when he went to town, and for this I thought tin bread best; so that two pieces of the dough were placed in two tins, the inside of which I rubbed with a piece of fat bacon; the rest we formed into cottage loaves—a large round below, a small one above—indenting the centre with the thumb. I watched Mrs. Medger do the first, and noted how thoroughly she covered her hands with flour as well as the board, and how deftly she rounded the two portions of the cottage loaf. We also made some long loaves (which were slashed across with the knife to insure lightness), for it is more economical to have large loaves, though not so appetising. Then they were placed by means of a very long-handled shovel, known as a peel, one by one in the oven, remaining there about an hour, the time required for a two-pound loaf in a brick oven.

I inquired the best way to tell when the bread was sufficiently baked, and was told that if a skewer thrust

into a loaf came out clean it was a sign that it was done, or if when the bottom of the loaf was struck it resounded audibly, or when a cloud of steam came from the oven when opened; but this must not be done too soon, or the bread would be heavy.

When we took the loaves out, which we did when Mrs. Medger's experienced eye told her they were baked enough, she suggested that pull-bread was a very good accompaniment to cheese. To make it we broke one of the cottage loaves in two, pulled some pieces of the crumb out roughly, and put them into the oven again until they were a crisp light brown.

We had had much conversation as the bread-making had proceeded. Mrs. Medger told me that some people put potatoes in the bread, two pounds boiled and mashed to a bushel of flour. This makes the bread cheaper, but it becomes stale much sooner. I was particularly cautioned to lay the loaves down flat when they came from the oven, or the steam soddens them.

When I became more proficient in the art of bread-making, I often put a little sugar and a few currants into a piece of the dough, and baking it in a tin, thus made a plain wholesome cake. Yeast dumplings, too, we soon came to consider a treat on baking days. They are made with a little butter and sugar in the dough, which when kneaded we divided into small pieces, rolled them into balls, and dropped them into boiling water, allowing them to boil twenty minutes. They are served quite hot and eaten with butter and sugar. Great care must be taken not to raise the lid while cooking, or they become heavy. If one was left, I used to cut it in slices and toast and butter it, when it proved as good as muffins.

The breakfast rolls I sometimes made were of the simplest. I mixed a little flour with yeast and milk, let it rise, and then added warm water and salt, mixing them all together with two ounces of butter. After it had stood three-quarters of an hour I made it up into rolls and baked in a quick oven, or just in front of the batch of bread.

I had every encouragement from my husband, who praised my several efforts in the culinary department more than I deserved.

I do not know that the knowledge I have acquired with regard to the art of baking has in any way interfered with other accomplishments, but I do know that it has contributed not a little to the general comfort of our small household, and I am convinced that what is worth knowing at all is worth knowing well, and that as far as women are concerned, no domestic knowledge ever comes amiss whether they be rich or poor.

