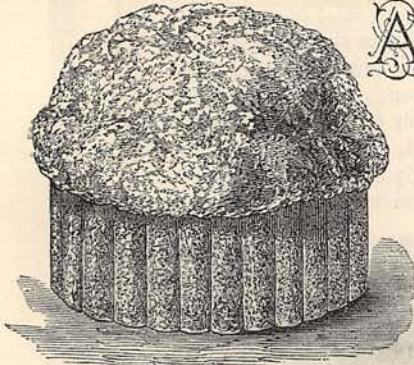


HOW TO MAKE PLAIN CAKES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A YEAR'S COOKERY."



A LITTLE while ago I said that one of the pleasantest parts of a cook's work was the making of pastry; but most people will acknowledge that it is equally interesting to make cakes.

There are very few of those interested in cookery who have not at one time or other tried their hands at this business, and sometimes after taking no end of pains the cake has come out heavy, or doughy, or burnt, and then what a disappointment it has been! I think, however, I can promise that those who will follow exactly the directions I am going to give now will succeed in making very good plain cakes, quite equal to "bought cakes," at a reasonable cost.

When once we have made up our minds to make a cake, the first thing we must think about is the oven. Every oven has an idiosyncrasy of its own. Wise men tell us that we conquer Nature only by obeying her; and in the same way we may say we get the most out of ovens only by studying their peculiarities, and falling in with their little ways. You understand your own oven; I do not—I only understand my own. Only I would advise you, whatever you do, to take such measures as will insure your having a good hot oven to bake your cakes in. If you cannot get that, leave the matter altogether, for very much of the excellence of a cake depends upon the baking.

What do we mean by a "good hot oven?" For my part, I mean an oven that feels glowingly hot when I put my hand into it for a minute. If the heat were such that I could not bear to keep my hand in, I should know the oven was too hot for my cakes, while if it were only pleasantly warm it would be too cool. This, however, is rather an uncertain way of deciding the question. The surest plan would be to have a thermometer let into the front of the oven, and we should know that we had the right heat for a moderate-sized cake when this rose to 240°. Thermometers, however, in ovens are not common, and so we must decide the matter in another way. Before putting the cake in the oven we may sprinkle a pinch of flour in the bottom of it. If in one minute this turns a bright golden brown the oven is of the right heat; if it turns black, it is too hot; if it does not brown, but is a dirty yellow colour, the oven is not hot enough.

One or two little points we must not forget. Small cakes require a quicker oven than do large ones. All

cakes should be put into the hotter part of the oven first, and left until they rise. They should then be placed in the cooler part, and allowed to bake gently through. If they brown too quickly they should have a sheet of paper laid over them. When we cannot have a perfect oven, it is better to have one that is too hot rather than one that is too cool. It is always possible to put an extra baking sheet under the cake-tin, and to lay a sheet of paper over the top if it is browning too quickly, thus retarding the action of the heat; but an oven that is "slack" is certain to make our cake heavy. Before beginning to mix our cake we should have all our ingredients prepared and weighed out. Cakes that are made with baking powder or soda (and it is of this kind that I am speaking now) should be baked as quickly as possible after they are moistened. Besides, it saves time to get the things ready beforehand, then mix them all together. If we mix our butter and flour, then stop to clean and dry our currants, and put them in; clean our hands again to beat the eggs, then stop all the proceedings while we line the cake-tin with buttered paper, we shall take twice as long over the business as we have any occasion to do.

The following are the preparations required:—

Grease the inside of the cake-tin throughout with dripping or butter. This will be best done with the fingers. For a superior cake line the tin with paper that has been buttered all over. The tins must not be more than two-thirds filled with the mixture.

Weigh the currants or raisins, turn them over, and see that no stones have been accidentally left in them. If they are not already washed, it will be better now that we are at this stage of the proceedings to leave them unwashed, contenting ourselves with sprinkling flour upon them and rubbing them well between the folds of a soft cloth. This would be to avoid using them either damp or hot, and so run the risk of making our cakes heavy. It is always best to clean currants in quantities as soon as they come from the grocer. They should be washed in cold water (boiling water injures their flavour), drained, spread out a few at a time on a towel, and have a little flour sprinkled over them, then dried slowly at the mouth of a cool oven (quick drying also injures their flavour), and tied down in jars for use. Sultanas may be cleaned in the same way.

Remove the sugar from the inside of the candied peel, and cut it into very thin strips. The flavour will be imparted to the cake more effectually by preparing it thus, rather than by either chopping it or putting in large pieces. Mixed peel is the best for cakes. This consists of citron, which is green; orange, which is dark; and lemon, which is light-coloured.

When large raisins are used they should be stoned and chopped small. Sultana raisins are not nearly so full of flavour as the others.

Butter, if salt, should be washed in two or three waters before being used. Good dripping is excellent for plain cakes. It will be more easily mixed with the flour if it is not over-hard; therefore, it may be softened in cold weather by being put into a basin and surrounded with boiling water for awhile, then broken up with a knife. It must not be *hot* when put in, or the cake will be heavy. In making superior cakes the butter should be "creamed"—that is, it should be beaten in a bowl with the hand till it is of the consistency of very thick cream—and the flour, sugar, eggs, and currants should be beaten in by turns a little at a time. But in making plain cakes the dripping may be rubbed into the flour, and the dry ingredients mixed thoroughly before any liquid is stirred in.

What is called castor sugar is the best for cakes. When loaf sugar is used it should be pounded and sifted. Flour, too, should be of fine quality. Home-made baking powder is the best for making cakes; the recipe for making it was given in CASSELL'S FAMILY MAGAZINE for May, 1880, page 363, in the article on Pastry.

When fresh lemon-rind is used it should either be grated on a coarse grater, or cut off very thinly without any of the white, and chopped small. The white part of lemon-rind is very bitter, and not fit for use.

Eggs should always be broken one at a time in a cup before they are put together. This is for fear any of them should be bad. The specks also should be removed. In making superior cakes the whites and the yolks are beaten separately—the yolks are stirred in briskly, and the whites are simply dashed into the mixture at the last moment. In plain cakes, however, the eggs may be beaten together, and mixed with the milk.

Last of all, we should be careful to mix the cakes *stiffly*. This is a great secret in making plain cakes. The flour must, of course, be entirely moistened, and the liquid well mixed with the dry ingredients; but when it is remembered that the fat in the cake will melt, and the sugar be dissolved, it will be seen that an abundance of moisture is not required.

Now that we have all our materials together, I will give a few recipes. The first is for a very cheap cake, plain and wholesome, but good. Put a pound of flour into a bowl, and with it a pinch of salt, and a large heaped tea-spoonful of baking powder. Mix thoroughly. Rub in a quarter of a pound of good beef dripping, and add half a pound of currants picked and dried, a quarter of a pound of sugar, one ounce of candied peel thinly cut, and half a tea-spoonful of grated lemon-rind. Make into a stiff paste with milk, and bake in a good oven.

The next cake is a little richer, and better altogether. It also is a cheap cake. Many mothers find that currants are not good for their children. When this is the case sultanas may always be used instead, as they are in this recipe. Put ten ounces of flour into a bowl, and add a small pinch of salt and two tea-spoonfuls of baking powder. Rub in four ounces of butter or clarified dripping, and add two ounces of

moist sugar, four ounces of sultanas, an ounce of candied peel, a tea-spoonful of grated lemon-rind, one egg, and milk to make a stiff paste.

The next is a seed cake. Put a pound of flour with a pinch of salt into a bowl, and rub in six ounces of butter or dripping; add six ounces of sugar, a tea-spoonful of mixed spice, and a table-spoonful of caraway seeds. Put a tumblerful of milk into a basin with a tea-spoonful of carbonate of soda, and set it in the oven till the soda is dissolved. Let it cool, and when cool add a table-spoonful of vinegar. Stir the liquid into the mixture to make a stiff paste, and bake the cake.

A richer seed cake may be made thus:—Put ten ounces of flour into a bowl with a pinch of salt, and two even tea-spoonfuls of baking powder. Mix thoroughly, then rub in four ounces of butter or good dripping, and add two ounces of sugar and a tea-spoonful of caraway seeds. Beat an egg; mix with it two table-spoonfuls of milk, and make the mixture into a stiff paste with the liquid. Bake as before.

Corn-flour cake will suit those who do not care for either currants or seeds. Take six ounces of corn-flour, three ounces of castor sugar, three ounces of butter, one even tea-spoonful of baking powder, two eggs, and a spoonful of milk. Beat the butter to cream, put with it the sugar, eggs, and milk. Mix the corn-flour and baking powder, and add these gradually, beating the mixture briskly for some minutes. Add four or five drops of essence of almonds, and bake in a lined tin in a brisk oven.

The following also is a good but rather rich cake:—Put a pound of flour into a bowl, and mix with it a quarter of a salt-spoonful of salt, and three tea-spoonfuls of baking powder. Mix thoroughly. Rub in half a pound of butter, or a quarter of a pound of butter and a quarter of a pound of lard; and add half a pound of sugar, half a pound of raisins, half a pound of currants, two ounces of mixed peel, a quarter of a tea-spoonful of grated nutmeg, two eggs, and milk to make a stiff paste.

In order to tell when a cake is sufficiently baked, push the blade of a knife quite down to the bottom of it in the middle. If this comes out clean and dry the cake is done. If at all moist, it must be put back again in the cool part of the oven again to "soak;" otherwise it will taste doughy. As soon as a cake is taken from the oven it should be turned out of the tin and placed on its side, but leaning on something to keep it from breaking. If left in the tin till cold it may become heavy.

Before closing I should like to give two recipes—one for Rock Cakes, and the other for Soda Buns. They are very easy to make, are inexpensive, and at the same time so good that they are sure to give satisfaction. The ingredients should be mixed very stiffly, and the cakes or buns placed an inch and a half apart on a floured baking sheet, in little knobs about the size of a walnut, and baked in a brisk oven.

Rock Cakes.—Put a quarter of a pound of clarified dripping into a basin with half a tea-spoonful of baking powder. Beat the fat to cream, and work in

gradually half a pound of flour. Add a quarter of a pound of currants, picked and dried, two ounces of moist sugar, two ounces of mixed peel finely cut, the rind of one lemon grated. Beat one egg, and mix with half a gill of milk, and stir these into the mixture.

Soda Buns.—Rub six ounces of butter into one pound of flour; add six ounces of white sugar, two ounces of mixed candied peel, finely shred. Put a quarter of a tea-spoonful of carbonate of soda into a table-spoonful of milk in a cup, and place this in the oven till the soda is dissolved. Let it cool, and put it

with the flour, butter, and sugar. Drop in separately the yolks of four and the whites of two eggs, and mix thoroughly. Bake also in a brisk oven.

Many people consider cakes unwholesome. Very rich cake undoubtedly is so, but a small portion of good plain home-made cake cannot hurt any one who is in good health. Any mother who wishes to give her children a treat cannot do better than give them one of the simple cakes the recipes for which have been given, and if the youngsters are not pleased with it, all I can say is, they are differently constituted from the little people of my acquaintance.

PHILLIS BROWNE.

A SONG FOR THE PEOPLE.

"THERE IS MANY A SLIP 'TWTIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP."

HERE is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,
As at times we all shall find,
And this is a truth that old age and youth
Ever should bear in mind.
Like children that race, with hurrying pace,
The butterfly over the lawn,
And straining to clasp the prize in their grasp
They stumble, and then it is gone.

There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip
Before we enjoy the draught;
The hand may shake or the glass may break,
And the liquid never be quaffed.

So never be sure, till you hold it secure,
Whatever you seek is won:
Till all danger is past and you hold it fast,
Count not the prize your own.

There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,
Many a snare and surprise;
With vigilant glance watch every chance,
Be patient, be cautious and wise.
Not always the race to the swiftest of pace,
The battle to him that is strong;
But the slow and the sure oft the winning secure—
That's the moral I teach in my song.

J. F. WALLER.

HOLIDAYS IN KENT: EYNSFORD AND LULLINGSTONE.



WE had found so much pleasure in our visit to Ightham, that we looked forward with no little anticipation of enjoyment to a day at Eynsford, but it was nearly at the end of March before we found ourselves on the way thither. A strong north wind was blowing, but Boreas had the politeness to cease his remonstrances when he found that we were a determined people, and long before we had reached our destination the sun was shining quite brightly.

The way to Eynsford from Sevenoaks is through Otford and Shoreham, along a road which continually rises, and commands a beautiful view of the valley of Holmsdale with its cultivated fields and undulating

pastures, threaded by the sparkling windings of the Darent.

There was formerly a noted ford over the river at Eynsford, from which the village derives its name. Its place is now supplied by a quaint little bridge several hundred years old, and from the middle of the central arch the mutilated image of a saint or a river deity keeps guard over the flowing water. A small house of the Elizabethan period adds additional interest to the picturesqueness of the scene.

We first read of Eynsford in connection with Archbishop Dunstan. In the tenth century it belonged to a rich Saxon named Ælphege, who, being of a generous disposition, gave it to his brother; but this relative dying soon afterwards, he renewed possession of the estates, and presently bestowed them upon Eadric, his brother's son. Eadric likewise dying and making no disposition of his effects, the land once again became the property of Ælphege, who granted to the widow a portion in Cray which Eadric had given to her for a dowry. A little later Ælphege was taken seriously ill at Scelfa (now called Chalk), and not doubting that his end was