

## SENTIMENTAL COOKERY.

BY ARDERN HOLT.



IN the opinion of a celebrated French dramatist, "Sociability over a book or good eating doubles the gratification from either or both." This probably is the reason why so many anniversaries and so many events are commemorated by some one article of food. The most prominent example of this lies in cakes: hot-cross-buns, wedding, funeral, fair, Easter, and harvest cakes, occur to the mind at once.

The subject is an interesting one, and I am going to give you some of the details—some of the whys and the wherefores thereof. I will begin with the wedding-cake—a subject that never seems to pall. It is of very ancient origin: brides of old offered cakes to Diana, and the *Confarreatio*—the most ancient and solemn marriage ceremony of the Romans—was so called because the cake (*far*) was carried before the bride. In England, we came to the present perfection of wedding-cake by degrees. Cakes and buns superseded hard, dry biscuits, and were made of spice, currants, milk, sugar, and eggs in Elizabeth's time; when some were thrown over the bride's head or put through her ring, and eaten for luck to inspire prophetic dreams; like the dumb-cake or dreaming-cake of a later time. This cake was divided into three; some was eaten by the young maidens, and some placed beneath their pillows, or in the foot of the left stocking, and thrown over the left shoulder while retiring to bed before twelve, the maidens walking backwards the while, in order that they might see their future husbands in their dreams. The small marriage-cakes of Elizabeth's reign became the rich mass of almond paste, plums, currants, citron, &c., in the hands of the French cooks brought over at the Restoration. Very curious customs appertain to bride-cake all the world over. In Yorkshire, a plateful is thrown from an upper window to be scrambled for; in Liburnia, the bride throws a hard cake of coarse flour over the bridegroom's house,

and the higher she throws it the happier she will be. In Georgia and Circassia, the bride kicks over a plate of dough set for her, and scatters it all over the room; and an old English custom was to raise a cake on a high pole, and the young man who first reached it was allowed to receive the bride and bridegroom on their arrival at their own home.

From gay to grave. In the North, a packet of flat sponge-cakes like saucers, with grated sugar on the top, often accompanies the invitation to a funeral, or the cakes are eaten on returning from church, or are sent with the subsequent hat-bands and gloves.

Fair-cakes are of all kinds, but gingerbread always plays an important part therein. I have a very pleasant remembrance of some we had as children in Yorkshire, which were not gingerbread; they were square, made of pastry, the corners turned up, and filled in with currants, spice, and nutmeg. These served for two fairs, held within three weeks of each other; it is hardly necessary to say that they ate better at the first. On similar occasions in the same county, we ate spiced ginger-cheese, pepper-cakes, and gingerbread loaf; and for the 5th of November, Yorkshire parkin is prepared. Never lose a chance of eating this. Make it, if you can, as follows:—4 lbs. of good Yorkshire oatmeal, 4 lbs. of treacle, 1 lb. of soft sugar, 1 lb. of butter, 2 oz. of powdered ginger. Mix the treacle and butter well together, and, when melted before the fire, add the other ingredients, stir with a knife, but do not knead it, and bake in a cool oven, in tins, about two inches thick. Turn it out when cold.

The use of cakes in old days was almost universal at religious festivals. Egyptians, Babylonians, Samians, Greeks, and Romans, all had sacred bread and cakes. In England, there are St. Michael's bannocks for Michaelmas, and the carvis or seed-cake for Allhallows Eve. These used to be called Soul cakes, and were sent about to friends in Northamptonshire and other counties. Very probably the plan originated in a country custom of sending wheat-cakes when wheat-sowing was over; these, plentifully besprinkled with carraways, were among the ploughman's perquisites; and Allhallows Eve fell at the same season. In old days, in Shropshire, these Soul cakes were laid on the table in a high heap—like the shewbread. They, in a manner, remind one of the harvest-cakes, which every county, as far as I know, patronises, though the ingredients differ. I will, however, give you a simple and good recipe, which I am sure is worth making:—2 lbs. of flour, 3 table-spoonfuls of fresh yeast,  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of currants,  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of sugar, 2 eggs, a little spice, and enough warm milk to make the mixture light. When it has risen sufficiently, work it into cakes of  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. each, bake in a cool oven for ten minutes, then brush over with milk and sugar.

For Christmas celebration there is no end to the good fare associated with the season: Yule-cakes, baby-cake, and the most delicious ginger and spiced cakes and loaves, which are sure to be offered you, in many parts of Yorkshire, and—last, not least—waffle cakes, which are thin, like the gauffre cakes sold at fairs.

This is how you make them:— $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of butter, 3 eggs, 2 table-spoonfuls of flour, a tea-cupful of milk, salt and nutmeg. Beat the butter to a cream, mix the yolks with it, add the flour by degrees, and pour on the cream; beat the whites of the eggs into a froth, add them to the other ingredients before baking. Rub the waffle-irons with butter, pour in the batter, so that all the interstices are filled; bake a light brown.

The following is a good North Country Yule-cake:—1 lb. of sifted flour, a salt-spoonful of salt,  $\frac{1}{4}$  oz. of German yeast,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint of tepid water. Stir in the flour with a wooden spoon, and let it stand in a warm place to rise, add  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. of butter beaten to a cream,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. moist sugar, a little grated nutmeg,  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. of currants, 4 oz. of candied peel, 2 beaten eggs. Mix well; half fill a tin, bake in moderate oven for two hours. Turn it out of the oven to get cool.

Twelfth Night cake was, as far back as 1620, made of flour, ginger, honey, and pepper, one for every family; portions were set apart and given away in alms. The maker thrust in a small coin at random when kneading it, or a bean, and a pea, and those who found them were constituted king and queen for the evening—a custom borrowed from the French *roi de la fête*. As time went on this has been enlarged upon; but the white sugared cake still survives.

There was an old custom in some places of placing the twelfth-cake on the horns of the oxen, with much ceremony. At St. Albans, Herts, on New Year's Day, curious buns in the shape of a woman were sold, and called Pope ladies. This reminds me of some curious cakes associated with Easter—viz., the Biddenham cakes, in commemoration of the Biddenham maidens, who were joined together at the hips and shoulders somewhat after the fashion of the Siamese twins. On Easter Sunday 1,000 rolls were for years given away to all strangers, with the effigies of these ladies upon them, dressed in the costume of Mary's reign, and showing that they possessed but one pair of arms between them. The money for this distribution was secured upon some twenty acres of land left by them for the purpose. The rolls were to be accompanied by cheese in proportion. Eggs, herb pudding, tansy-cakes, which were all given at Easter, had their origin in the fact that people poured into the churches for the Easter communion, many coming long distances. The hotels were filled, and the clergy and laity were refreshed after the service. Herb pudding was made of the tops of young nettles, docken leaves, and other early greenery, to be found in the hedges or specially cultivated for the purpose. During the Easter holidays young people played hand-ball for tansy-balls; but why and wherefore has not been told us.

This is a good recipe for the ordinary Easter cake:—4 lbs. of flour, 2 lbs. of butter, 2 lbs. of sifted sugar, eight yolks and four whites of eggs, a tea-spoonful of sal-volatile, and cinnamon to taste. Mix 1 lb. of butter with the flour, add the sugar and spice; melt the other pound of butter and mix it with the eggs, then all together, roll it out thin, cut the paste into good-sized rounds, put them on a floured tin, and bake in the oven.

St. David's Day was celebrated by taffy-cakes, and Lent by these same tansy-cakes, and the carling, simbling, and simnel-cake for Simmel or Mothering Sunday—viz., mid-Lent Sunday.

Harland, in his "Lancashire Legends," talks of—

"The good rounde sugarye  
Kinge of Cakes, a Burye Symnelle,  
It speaks of deareste familie tyes,  
From friende to friende in Lent it hyes;  
To all good fellowshippes yt cries,  
I'm a righte trewe Burye Simnelle."

It is made of 3 lbs. of flour, 1 lb. of butter, well rubbed into the flour, 3 lbs. of currants, 1 lb. of sugar, 3 oz. of ground cinnamon, 2 oz. of bitter, 2 oz. of sweet almonds, blanched and chopped, 3 oz. of candied lemon, four eggs, taking out two yolks, and some cooks add half a tea-cupful of barm. There are varieties in the recipe, but this a good one.

Pan-cakes are of very ancient origin, and were an offering by the pagan Saxons to the sun. Shrove Tuesday really means confession Tuesday—the day immediately before Ash Wednesday—when everybody was expected to obtain absolution, and, to remind them, a great bell was rung in every parish. This in time came to be called pancake bell, as it was the signal for the cook to put the pancake on the fire. Old writers describe them as made of wheaten flour, water, eggs, and spice, placed in a frying-pan with boiling suet. In some places the youths and maidens used to flit from house to house collecting the various requisites to make them. There is a superstition that some of the white of egg should be put into a glass of pure water and set near the window, where, the sun shining on it, it will foretell the future, for the white of egg floats about and takes some form—say a ship or a tent, foretelling a sailor's or a soldier's career, for example.

Hot-cross-buns, like most cakes eaten at religious seasons, were a sort of stay to the appetite till more substantial fare could be obtained. By some they are considered symbolic of the bread broken by our Lord Himself at the Last Supper, and of His death on Calvary. To break a Good Friday bun has always been considered a pledge of friendship, and a surety against disagreement, the act being accompanied by the words:—

"Half for you and half for me,  
Between us two goodwill shall be."

Hot-cross-buns were supposed to be endowed with some peculiar sanctity, and were kept through the year for good luck, as a charm against fire, and a remedy for certain diseases.

