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OMENS ABOUT BREAD.

WHAT HOUSEWIVES HAVE BELIEVED FOR CENTURIES. They Make the Dough Nowadays with the Sign of the Cross, Just as the Ancient Romans Did—Superstitions that Die Slowly.

It would be surprising, indeed, if there were not many superstitions about bread. The one indispensable article of food is naturally in every nation a favorite subject of folk lore. No French peasant begins a new loaf without crossing it with the knife. The English superstition that bread cracked in the baking portends misfortunes in the family has taken root in America. In Germany, too, the housewife still believes that cracks on the top of the loaf of bread indicate the death of some one in the household, or, perhaps, misfortune to a dear friend, while cracks on the lower side of the bread are taken to indicate a birth.

As many of us know, our bakers mark the sign of a cross upon the dough before placing it in the oven. The reason for making this sign becomes plain when we know the origin of the custom. Almost all our superstitions about bread date back to old pagan days, though they have been greatly modified so as to conform to Christian beliefs. With the ancient Romans, the baking of bread and cakes was often invested with a religious significance, especially the cakes offered to the gods and goddesses. These cakes were prepared in a particular way, and after being marked with the symbol of the deity in whose honor they were offered, they were supposed to possess supernatural virtues.

The old domestic practice was modified when Christianity became triumphant, and, in place of a pagan symbol, the early Christian housewife not only used to make the sign of the cross when she began to knead the dough, but she marked that sign upon her loaf before placing it in the oven. Why? Simply because the sign of the cross is the recognized Christian protecting mark against the attacks of evil spirits, witches and the like. Hence, bread marked with the cross is supposed to be witch proof, will bake all right, not crack across the top, etc.

Just as the Jews have Passover cakes, and other peoples have special festivals, so Christians have cakes for certain seasons. Our hot cross buns on Good Friday are simply modern representatives of the cakes used at some old pagan festival. In days gone by, the cakes and buns baked at Easter were supposed to possess great virtue. Thus, it is an old belief that the observance of eating cross buns on Good Friday insures, so to speak, the house from fire for the coming year. We still eat a certain kind of pancake on Shrove Tuesday. The practice is referred to in "All's Well That Ends Well," where the clown speaks of a "pancake for Shrove Tuesday." In "Pericles" they are called "flapjacks"—a term still used in country districts.

In truth, to study the superstitions about bread is to take a wide lesson in folk lore. These superstitions relate to the kneading trough, the oven, bakers and bread. For instance, in many parts of France the "arche" or kneading trough, is more than a rude kitchen utensil; it is often a pretty bit of furniture. M. Sebillot, who has collected many of the superstitions of the French folk relative to bread, quotes the story of a thief who entered the window of a house with intent to commit burglary, but refused to step on the trough still containing the dough, believing that to do so would be an impiety. This is similar to the American story of two hungry burglars who refused to satisfy their hunger with the meat which they found in a well-stocked larder because it was Friday.

A writer in one of our magazines says that in Gottland the cross is still signed before the oven fire is lighted or the dough kneaded. This practice is very common in the country districts all over Europe. In Brittany the housewife makes the sign of the cross with the right hand while she places the dough in the trough. After the dough is kneaded the lid of the trough is shut, and so is the door; for if a cat should enter the room the bread would not rise. Certain charms of invocations are used to cause the bread to multiply itself. Thus, the peasant housewife adjures the dough to imitate the heaven, the wheat, the miller, and to rise. She would be very angry if any one should sing or whistle in the room while she is making the loaf.

In some parts of Europe the bake oven is almost a sacred object. In certain places of Brittany, for example, it is dedicated with ceremonies; the wood is sprinkled with blessed water; the proper heat is attested by the melting of a bottle, and, finally, an egg is broken for luck. Besides, there are certain days on which bread must not be baked, as on Good Friday or during the night of All Saints, when the ghosts would be sure to eat it.—Household Words.

DAMAGES FOR MORPHINE HABIT

Curious Lawsuit Recently Tried in the English Courts. The English medical journals contain reports of a curious law suit which has just been on trial in an English court. A nurse brought action against her physician for alleged malpractice in prescribing morphine for her in therapeutic doses, and thereby inducing in her the morphine habit. The doctor was accused of negligence and a desire to get rid of a troublesome patient. It is to the credit of

the jury that, having heard the plaintiff's side of the case, they stopped the trial, and expressed the opinion that the action ought never to have been brought.

The case suggests some rather curious reflections. We do not doubt that some physicians are sometimes rather careless in prescribing such drugs as morphine and cocaine; but it would be difficult to apportion the exact degree of responsibility and the exact amount of damages, if every morphine fiend were to have redress in court from every physician who had ever prescribed a dose of such drugs for him or her. The precedent established by one such case would be rather disquieting to every doctor in active practice. In this English case the fact that the plaintiff was a nurse, and knew well the dangerous effects of the drug which she continued taking of her own accord, should have been enough to satisfy her lawyers that she had no claims either in justice or in law. Such remote consequences are hardly to be ascribed at a money value, or to be attributed to the fault of a physician who had merely given the drug in therapeutic doses.—Philadelphia Medical Journal.

Died of a Broken Heart. To one not intimately acquainted with the affectionate nature of animals it would seem absurd to say that even a household pet could die of what is known, for want of a better term, as "a broken heart." Yet Mr. Broderip in his "Leaves from the Note-Book of a Naturalist" declares that the case is not uncommon, and cites in example the tragedy of a little beaver.

Binnie, as the beaver was called, was a great pet in the family, and had not been long in the London home before he set about building a dam for himself as cheerfully as if he had been in his native haunts. Plenty of dainty little titbits from the kitchen found their way to him through the hands of the housekeeper, who took great interest in him and speedily won his affection. He showed his devotion to her in many pretty and amusing ways. At last, on the removal of his master from town, he was taken to the Tower of London, and put in commodious quarters under the care of a kind attendant.

Everything was done to make Binnie happy, but he lost all appetite and took no interest in his surroundings. Sweetmeats were brought, but he would not touch them, and grew daily thinner and weaker. At last the attendant, in despair, took Binnie back to the housekeeper with whom he had lived since the earliest days of his captivity. At sight of her the creature gave a cry of delight and dragged himself to her side. Unfortunately, it was too late to restore his health and spirits. He was already so weakened that he died within a few days, much to the grief of all his friends.

Crowning of Richard III. While men's minds as well as women's are turned on coronation robes and kindred splendors, it is interesting to compare the old with the new fashions.

The description of the costume worn by Richard III, at his crowning and ordered by himself was, according to a list, still extant, composed of a doublet made of two yards and a quarter and a half of blue cloth of gold, wrought with nets and pome apples, with a stomacher of the same, lined on all of Holland cloth, and on all of busa, instead of green cloth of gold, and a longe gown for to ride in, made of eight yards of p'p'ul velvet furred with tymbres and a half and thirteen balks of ermyn, and four tymbres, seventeen coombes of ermyn powdered with 3,300 powderings made of boggy shanks, and a payre of short spurs with gilt.

To give the exact meaning of the old wording, says the London Chronicle, would make a pretty task for scholars the day before King Edward VII.'s anointing. But the "longe gown for the cycle in" is an obvious hint for to-day.

Had an Expensive One. Just now hundreds of young girls have the pyrographic craze in its worst form. It is a money-eating fad. Not only is the burning outfit itself expensive, but the wooden blanks on which the drawings are traced with the hot iron needle cost from 25 cents to as much as \$10 or \$15, according to the size and shape. The humble quarter will buy a good-sized square bit of soft pine, \$15 a beautiful table or chair on which a design has been printed ready for the artist's touch. One young girl who is restricted as to pocket money and yet very much interested in the work, has discovered a way to gratify her pyrographic taste by visits to the house-furnishing section of the large department stores. There she buys bread boards—smooth, hard wood, 12-inch, 9-cent bread boards—for her plaques. These she finds take on a far richer brown than the 50-cent soft, white pine plaques of the same size. The bread boards can be worked up just as artistically as can the slabs made especially for devotees of the "fad."

Brightening Up. "Your imperial and bombproof majesty," said the chief armor tester to the Czar, "will doubtless be pleased to learn that the peace conference you called at The Hague is bearing fruit." "So?" inquired Nicholas. "Is the Boer war over?" "Not quite so good as that," answered the official, "but dispatches from America say that the baseball war is at an end."—Baltimore American.

In going into a store to file a kick, say, "There was a mistake made," instead of "You made a mistake."

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