

PAT-A-CAKE, PAT-A-CAKE, BAKER-MAN

THAT was the old story when the flour-to-the-elbows baker mixed his dough, kneaded it, set it to rise, knocked it down, set it to rise, cut it with a long, sharp knife, and shuffled it into roundness, patted it into smoothness ready for the wood-fired oven. But there's not much patting done in the big modern bakeries these nights: electricity, cast iron, and the endless belt has robbed the baker's hands of their old work. The penny roll, the penny bun, are patted still; but not the 2lb. loaf, your daily bread.

You buy it fresh in the shop across the street in time for morning tea—perhaps it's slightly warm still. Twelve hours ago it was dry flour, water in the pipe, salt in the bin, compressed yeast in the container, and a few other things (including that nutty flavour) waiting to be called in.

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AT the bakery the doughman is first to arrive, six hours before the rest of the men. (On Fridays he comes at 11.30 a.m., on other days about 5 p.m.)

He sets a six-hour (or slow) dough ready for the first batch of bread—it will go into the ovens about midnight. The doughman will go home after midnight when he has prepared the last batch of dough, a quick dough which takes as little as two or three hours to rise.

When the dough is proofed or risen and knocked down it sets out on its mechanical journey to the oven: through automatic dividers (to parcel the dough for a 2lb. loaf into its right size and weight) into series of iron moulds, over endless belts and under automatic knives, the softly bumpy stream of white dough flows and curves into the baking tins to be proofed again and then wheeled on huge trolleys to the oven door—and there even the oven comes out automatically to meet it. A wheel is turned, and sizzling, crackling into the warm air of the bakehouse comes the black-hot inside floor of the oven—an iron table on wheels. The pans of bread are loaded, the draw-plate is wheeled back, the door is shut, and the browning-off process begins. In an hour or so the whole bakehouse is filled with the disturbing smell of crisp-crusts, oven-hot bread—a whole army of shining loaves drawn up ready for embarkation

orders—and, in the background, the smell of the yeast and the raw dough.

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I WENT round a big Auckland bakery with the manager and round a small one with the owner. The small bakery makes everything from buns to block cake, but not plain bread; the big one makes all kinds of bread, rolls and buns, but not cakes. The big bakery has a dozen or so ovens automatically fired with coal or oil, the heat being controlled by thermostat; the small bakery has the one oven, man-fed with four-inch manuka logs, a few of which are put into the cooling oven to bake dry for quick kindling the next day. The oven in the small bakery is the same size as the ones in the big bakery; the difference is that the thermostat-controlled ovens in the big bakery will bake batch after batch of bread at the same temperature all through the night, but the oven in the small bakery gradually loses heat, cooking down the scale from pastry to shortbread and block cake. The mixing bowl (perhaps I should call it the mixing well) in the small bakery mixes 100lb. of flour, beats up 260 eggs at a time;

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