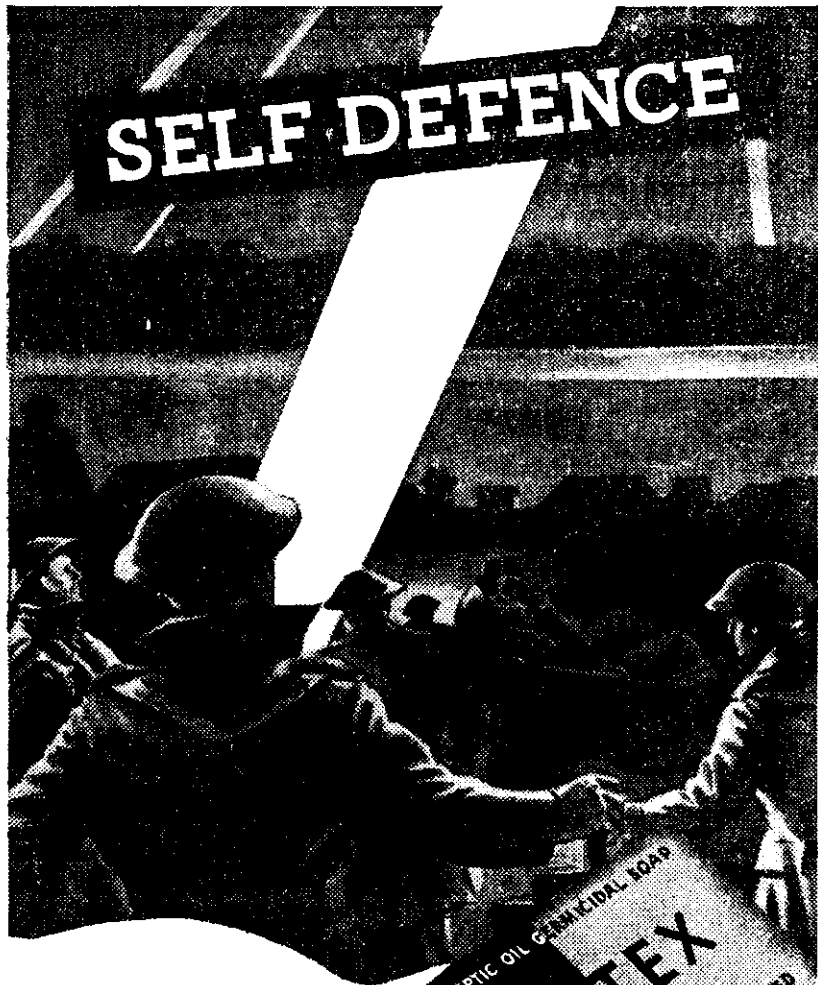
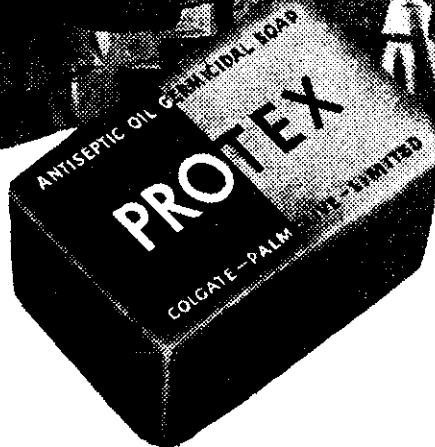


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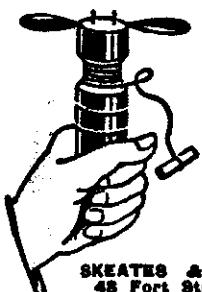
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PAT-A-CAKE, PAT-A-CAKE

(continued from previous page)

Everywhere on the other side of the cubicles there were huge trows or troughs in which the bread was wheeled from the ovens.

We inspected the coal houses, the automatic firing boxes which gradually feed coal to the fires as the thermostat gives them their orders, the special Vienna bread oven, and the fearsome ovens with the floors-on-wheels—looking as if they should belong in torture chambers in the Middle Ages.

Career Cat

From the dark doorway of one of the coal houses there strolled a black cat, tail in air, white front gleaming. She reminded me of something.

"Do you ever see any mice?" I asked the manager.

His face sagged. "God forbid!" he said. "Can't you have a bit of tact?" asked the black cat. "Can't you see the whole idea of Mouse is a nightmare to him? What d'you suppose I'm here for? I can tell you I have the most responsible job in the place. They sift the flour with automatic brushes and electric sieves, they polish all the metal, they keep everything hotsy-totsy-clean, they do all that Man can do, but you know what Mouse is—and I'm the only person in the place to deal with that vermin."

"And what hours do you work?" I asked. (The manager was staring at his feet in a trance).

"Hours?" she said. "Hours? Khah!" (which is the only way my typewriter can deal with her cynical laughter). Her white whiskers rose in astonishment as she yawned. "You don't imagine I'm a unionite, do you? Lamsy divey, I work the clock round. Then I always work the overtime with the chaps on Friday nights and Saturdays as well."

"And do you get many?" I asked quietly, not to wake the manager from his trance.

"I do and I don't," she said. "Sometimes I get along all right, other times I have to swipe a 3d coupon from the boss here. Well, I can't stand yattering here all night wasting my time; anything else you want to know?"

"M'm, well," I floundered, "you like the work?"

"Like it?" she said. "Khah! It's my career, isn't it? What's more, I'm the only female employed in this bake-house."

I could have known she was a career cat when she gave me that responsibility stuff in the beginning.

* * *

The manager explained that of all the men who were working here not many were skilled bakers; some of them were classed as labourers and they would never become expert tradesmen.

"If a boy wants to learn the trade he has to go to a small place where they make bread and small goods so that he can go right through every branch. I'm a baker, I can take the doughman's place here, or make the buns or rolls, and I've done cake-making (at home as well as in a bakery) and wedding-cake decorating in my time. That's the right way to learn a trade—start at the beginning and go through every branch."

I was home by midnight. Most of the men working in that bakery would go home with the milk next morning early.

—J.

(continued on next page)