



From a painting by Morston Constantine Ream.
Courtesy Springfield, Mass., Museum of Fine Arts.

A Rich and Varied Menu

BLUE TROUT AND BLACK TRUFFLES. *The Peregrinations of An Epicure.* By Joseph Wechsberg. Decorations by Warren Chappel. 288 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$3.75.

By REX STOUT

I GOT a fever from reading this book, but that was all right. It was in the form of a burning desire to go immediately and simultaneously to six different places and eat six different meals—obviously so impractical that I brought my temperature back to normal by going to the kitchen and cooking a couple of eggs *au beurre noir*.

Joseph Wechsberg's book starts with munching raw bacon (sprinkled with paprika) sandwiches in the fourth gallery of Vienna's State Opera while Siegmund and Sieglinde sang their sweet duet of Love and Spring, and ends with *gratin de queues d'écrevisses* at the Restaurant de la Pyramide near Lyon, concocted by Fernand Point, "incontestably the greatest chef on earth." That is like starting a book on baseball in a sandlot and ending at the deciding game of a world series at the Yankee Stadium—which is exactly what a book on baseball should do.

What should a book on *la grande cuisine* do? Certainly not try to tell the reader how to produce masterpieces on his gas stove. Mr. Wechsberg says that he never asked M. Point for one of his recipes because that would have been like attempting to become a master of the cello by watching Pablo Casals. No; such a book is for delight, not instruction—the delight of meeting the greatest practitioners of the oldest art in

Mr. Stout, who created Nero Wolfe, is an authority on high cookery.

the world, of seeing them at work, appreciating their creations, and sharing in their triumphs. That is what this book does.

In between the raw bacon sandwiches and M. Point's *écrevisses* is a rich and varied menu of treats. The fish dish that rescued Mr. Wechsberg from Saturday night guard duty in the Austrian army. The twenty-four varieties of boiled beef at Meisl & Schadn in pre-war Vienna, where boiled beef "was not a dish; it was a way of life." The sausage shops of Prague. The Gundel Restaurant in Budapest in 1948, struggling to preserve a vestige of the humanities behind the Iron Curtain, and its veal cutlet, Pittsburgh style, created by Charles Gundel for a visiting Mayor of Pittsburgh who ate there once. The true Genoese ravioli as served in a waterfront cellar in Genoa. The capricious peccadilloes of truffles. The simple trick of a perfect *béarnaise*. The lowdown on the most renowned restaurants of Paris. The waiter at La Mère Brazier who thought there must absolutely be more chicken livers in France than potatoes.

THIS fine book makes a clear that the spirit of *la grande cuisine* is the spirit that is essential to any human performance that deserves to be called grand. The wife of M. Alexandre Dumaine of the Hôtel de la Côte d'Or told Mr. Wechsberg:

"A few years ago my husband was very sick. Between attacks of delirium he would talk only of cooking. Once he said to me, 'I think I know now how to make a *good coq au vin*.' I said, 'But you've made it for the past thirty years,' and he said, 'That was just practice!'"

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