PROFILES

TEMPEST IN A KITCHEN

ONE of the most passionately dedicated and severely uncompromising organizations in France is the Club des Cent, a group of a hundred men who regard themselves, and are generally regarded, as the supreme arbiters of their country's gastronomy. Unlike the many gastronomic societies that have been founded for the more or less successfully concealed purpose of promoting certain wines, regional food specialties, or personalities, the Club des Cent has never allowed itself to be associated with any commercial interests, and chefs, wine merchants, and restaurant owners are automatically blackballed. Vacancies arising through the death of members are quickly filled from a long waiting list of candidates made up of eminent and discriminating lawyers, doctors, statesmen, industrialists, artists, and authors, as well as full-time epicures, of whom there are not a few in France. The members of the Club des Cent meet every Thursday for lunch at one or another of the great Paris restaurants—at Maxim's, most often—and two or three times a year they charter a railroad car and make a pilgrimage to some provincial shrine of the culinary art. During the past several years, the club has on a number of occasions chosen the Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or, in Saulieu, a hundred and fifty miles southeast of Paris, as the object of its ceremonial sortie into the hinterland, drawn there by the fact that its owner and chef is Alexandre Dumaine, who, since the death last March of his friend Fernand Point, stands second to none as a practitioner of *la grande cuisine*.

Dumaine is one of the most decorated French chefs. After one particularly successful Club des Cent luncheon, the members awarded him the diploma and gold medal of their society. He also holds the diploma of the Club des Purs Cent, an offshoot of the Club des Cent, and the gold medal of the Cercle des Gourmettes, a group of ladies more concerned with good food than with their waistlines; he has received the *cravate* of Grand Officier de la Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin from Marshal Juin, and he is an honorary member of the Académie Culinaire de France, a Commandeur des Cordons Bleus, Lauréat du Prix de la Qualité Française, and a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur. In recent years, the restaurant of his Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or has never been awarded fewer than three stars, the highest culinary rating, by the annually revised and greatly respected "Guide Michelin." Some of Dumaine's admirers call him "Alexandre the Great," but perhaps the finest tribute of all was paid to him, in my presence, a little more than a year ago by Point, who, as the proprietor of the Restaurant de la Pyramide, at Vienne, in the Département de l'Isère, was at the time incontestably the greatest man in his profession. "*Dumaine, c'est un grand chef*," Point said, speaking slowly and emphatically, and then he nodded twice to underscore the statement. Such praise was rare indeed from Point, who was called "Le Roi" by the other leading chefs of France. Point's unfortunate death recalled to my mind what he had said about Dumaine and gave me the idea of some day paying a visit to the man he may very well have looked upon as his successor. One evening not long ago, while killing time by studying a roadmap in the lobby of a hotel in Dijon, where I had put up for the night in the course of a leisurely trip from Strasbourg to Marseille, I saw that I was only a few miles from Saulieu, and I decided that the next morning I would drive over there to have a talk with the great man and—an equally attractive prospect—lunch in his restaurant. So I telephoned for a reservation, and the woman who answered, after taking my name, asked, "Have you any special request, Monsieur, or do you wish to leave the composition of your lunch to M. Dumaine?" I replied that I would be delighted to leave everything in his hands.

Alexandre Dumaine

SAULIEU, with a population of twenty-five hundred and situated in the Département de la Côte-d'Or, is a two-thousand-year-old town that was called Sidolocum by the Romans, and during the early centuries of the Christian era it was as popular among caravan travellers who knew a good stopover when they saw one as it is now among Frenchmen who are discerning in their choice of restaurants. Today, it is famous for producing the best hams in France; for the Church of Saint-Andoche, a fine specimen of twelfth-century Burgundian-Romanesque architecture that contains a restored fifth-century sarcophagus; for having had a galaxy of earlier visitors that included Vercingetorix, Charlemagne, Philippe le Hardi, Henri IV, Madame de Sévigné, Napoleon, Stendhal, and Chateaubriand; and, of course, for Dumaine's Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or. The last of these distinctions, I discovered upon reaching Saulieu, is housed in an unpretentious but immaculate two-story yellowish building that stands on the old Via Agrippina, which was built around 20 B.C. as a link between Lyon and Boulogne-sur-Mer and for some distance north and south of Saulieu is now better known as Route Nationale No. 6. Across the façade of the hotel is a large blue band bearing in gold letters the inscription "HOTEL DE LA COTE-D'OR," and beneath this is a smaller sign, reading "Alexandre Dumaine, Traiteur." The term "*traiteur*," which means "eating-house keeper," suggests the owner's preference for old-fashioned simplicity. His establishment faces the Hôtel de la Poste (one star), and is flanked by gas stations, bordered by a hedge, and enveloped in the exhaust fumes of automobiles and trucks passing by, at high speed and with a good deal of noise, on their way to Paris or Marseille.

Entering the lobby, I found it in keeping with the "*Traiteur*" on the sign. The floor is tiled, the walls are wood-panelled, the tables are glass-covered, and the chairs are simple. As a concession to most Anglo-Saxon (and quite a few French) customers, there is a small but well-stocked bar half hidden between two pillars. To the right of the entrance is the desk, in bourgeois-French-hotel style, and behind the desk is a rack of small mailboxes and, hanging from the wall, the keys to the thirty guest rooms. (More than one motorist, expecting to stop by only for a meal, has found the hotel accommodations a blessing, enabling him to sleep off a three-hour, six-course meal, with four kinds of wine, be-

fore plunging back into the anarchy of French highway traffic.) The mural decorations in the lobby consist in part of framed menus of gala luncheons served by the chef-proprietor to since-deposed monarchs (Alfonso XIII of Spain, Farouk of Egypt, and Bao Dai of Annam); to Prosper Montagné, another great chef; to Edmond Saillant, one of the country's most fastidious connoisseurs of good dining and, as such, perhaps better known by his nom de plume of Maurice Curnonsky; and so on. There are also newspaper clippings showing photographs of a short, plump, mustachioed, round-faced man with benign eyes and the smile of a contented Buddha; panegyrical captions inform the stranger that this is the French cuisine's Alexandre the Great. But the most interesting ornament is a large sign, addressed to "*Cher Client,*" that lists and describes at considerable and mouth-watering length many of the dishes the chef of the Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or recommends to his guests. The list is divided into three sections—dishes that are always available during the restaurant's regular meal hours, specialties of the day, which vary according to the season, and, finally, a staggering enumeration of delicacies Dumaine stands ready to prepare for guests who, "not wanting to leave anything to chance," telephone their orders at least twenty-four hours in advance of their arrival. Here is a typical excerpt from this last section:

Un Feuilleté léger ou le Gratin de queues d'Ecrevisses; des Ecrevisses à la crème; un Soufflé d'Ecrevisses; une Truite au Chambertin; des Suprêmes de Brocheton piqués, accompagnés d'une sauce Cardinal; une Anguille Bourguignonne; des Œufs au Jambon à la gelée, d'après la vieille et magnifique recette du pays; des Œufs de Canard au beurre de Montpellier; une Potée régionale; des Ris de Veau Nantua; un Jambonneau de l'Auxois Soubise; un Pâté de Pigeonneaux Rabelaisien; une Poularde divine ou des Ducs de Bourgogne, ou encore au blanc; un Porcelet rôti farci de boudins blancs et noirs; un Caneton aux navets de Jarnois, ces fins navets localement réputés qui ne poussent que sur une étroite bande de terre dans un hameau d'Alligny-en-Morvand; des Côtes de Mouton Champvallon; une Daube du pays, chaude ou froide, dans la gelée printanière; une Timbale de Morilles Châtelaine; une Chartreuse de Perdreaux; des Ortolans; des Alouettes; des Cailles; des Bécasses; un Faisan Souvaroff; un Râble de Lièvre à la crème ou un Lièvre à la royale, d'après la très belle et très spirituelle recette d'autrefois dite des "60 gousses d'ail," en réalité 20 d'ail et 40 d'échalote, recette dont l'exécution est une véritable cérémonie doublée d'une joie pour l'officiant . . .

As I read and jotted down these lilting lines, I grew weak with anticipation. I had eaten no breakfast, in order to do justice to my lunch at the Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or, and I had not expected to have my appetite so prematurely and so tantalizingly stimulated. It was only a little after nine o'clock, for I had arrived early in the hope of having a few words with Dumaine before the pressures of his day set in, and now I felt that I could never hold out until lunchtime.

Just then, a slender woman, with soft eyes and an earnest, kindly face and wearing an austerely tailored suit, came into the lobby from somewhere out back. I introduced myself, and she told me that she was Jeanne Dumaine, the wife of the proprietor. I soon found out that she was also her husband's general manager and closest adviser, as well as his maître d'hôtel, bookkeeper, personnel director, and confidential secretary, but when I asked her what her official position in the establishment was, she replied simply, "I help my husband." She has been doing just that ever since they were married, thirty-three years ago.

When I broached the subject of having a few words with M. Dumaine, his wife replied guardedly that he was in the kitchen. "He's always in the kitchen—cooking, experimenting, improving, creating," she went on. "He's a wonderful man, Monsieur—he lives, thinks, dreams only cuisine. He used to like to hunt—woodcock and partridge—but he's given that up. He's happy nowhere but in his kitchen. It's his home. And it isn't the same when he isn't in it, either. If he stays away longer than forty-eight hours, Monsieur, it's disaster. Once a year, in No-

"Someday, I suppose, you'll be a Grandma Moses."

"See, it's not only me. You rub everyone the wrong way."

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vember, we close the place for a couple of weeks, to give our employees a rest. My husband and I go to Nice to visit my sister, and all the time we're there, my husband walks the streets, lonely for his kitchen. He has the obsession of the real artist, Monsieur. He sleeps in a small room upstairs facing the highway. He first moved into it because he felt no guest would want it, on account of all the heavy trucks going by. Well, now he has become so accustomed to the noise that when traffic lets up, after midnight, the quiet often wakes him. And then what does he do? He switches on the light and sits up in his chair and reads recipes. He reads recipes the way conductors read scores. Last night, he sat up like that for three hours, working on the menu for the next lunch of the Club des Cent."

I suggested to Mme. Dumaine that perhaps I might be allowed to stand by in the kitchen and watch her husband prepare my meal. I knew that Dumaine, unlike most owners of celebrated restaurants, even in France, insists on doing all the cooking himself, and I was eager to see the Master in action. But Mme. Dumaine looked unhappy. She said no one was *ever* allowed in the kitchen at mealtime except the people working there and the waiters; she herself would not dare venture into it then. I concluded that Dumaine, for all his amiable appearance in the newspaper photographs, probably had his choleric moments, and this impression was borne out later when I learned that in writing to her husband, Mme. Dumaine always begins her letters "*Chère Tempête.*"

As we stood there talking, Dumaine, dressed in chef's whites but without the high cap, came in from the kitchen, nervously puffing on a cigarette. He seemed preoccupied, and hardly looked at me as we shook hands. Telling his wife that he had at last made up his mind what to serve at the lunch of the Club des Cent, he showed her a handwritten menu and watched her anxiously while she read it. When, at length, she smiled and said it was a fine menu, a splendid menu, he looked relieved. "It came to me while I was sitting up last night," he said. "Suddenly, there in the quiet, everything became quite clear in my mind. The *toque!* The *toque* must be served at the *end* of the meal, not as an hors d'oeuvre. After that, the rest was easy. The *toque* will be the climax. And after the meal they'll agree with me."

"Of course they will," Mme. Dumaine assured him.

I asked if I might have a look at the menu, and when Dumaine absently assented, his wife handed it to me. It read:

Fumet de Geline en Tasse
Pouilly-Fuissé "Château de Fuissé" '50
Chablis "La Fourchaume" '53

Turbans de Lavaret Cardinalisés
Puligny-Montrachet "Clos de la Pucelle" '45

Pot-au-Feu aux Quatre Services
un de jambon
un des poulardes
un de judru
un d'aiguillette à la ficelle
Morgon le Py '53

La Toque du Président Adolphe Clerc
Clos de Vougeot '34

Les Fromages de Saison Sélectionnés

Le Sédélocien
Deutz et Geldermann '43

Corbeille de fruits

"Everything else leads up to the *toque*," Dumaine said, as I gave the menu back to his wife. He put out his cigarette and at once took another from a rumpled package of Gauloises. "No hors d'oeuvre at all. Gastronomes don't like them. Just the fumet, and then the fish—a savarin filled with many good things, including a ragout of shellfish Nantua. *Ah, c'est magnifique!* Next, a light meat dish—boiled ham, boiled chicken, boiled *judru* [a thick, spiced Lyonese sausage], and boiled beef tied up with a string. Everything is light, and you're still hungry. Then, at last"—he raised both hands in an exultant gesture—"the *toque!* The great pâté!"

I asked about the *toque*. Dumaine seemed pleased, and for the first time looked me full in the face, as if he were really aware of my presence. "It is one of the three most famous pâtés of *la grande cuisine*," he said. "Lucien Tendret, who lived in Belley, where Brillat-Savarin was born, listed them in his dis-

tinguished book 'La Table au Pays de Brillat-Savarin.' One of the pâtés is *le Chapeau de Monseigneur Gabriel Cortois de Quinsey*, the second is *l'Oreiller de la Belle Aurore*, and *la Toque du Président Adolphe Clerc* is the third. After Brillat-Savarin's death, his country house at Vieu, in Valromey, belonged to Doctor Frédéric Brillat-Savarin, his grandnephew. Each year on the ninth of September, the day of the local fair, a lunch was held in honor of Brillat-Savarin's memory, and was attended by many of his old friends. A bust of their idol stood on the mantel of the dining room. At noon, they would start drinking wine from Brillat-Savarin's vineyard and eating *l'Oreiller de la Belle Aurore*, which was named after his mother, Claudine-Aurore Récamier. It's a superb recipe that starts out 'Take a rump of veal, two red-legged partridges, a saddle of hare, a chicken, a duck, half a pound of a filet of pork, and two blanched sweetbreads.' What a pâté! I've made it many times. Last year, I prepared *le Chapeau de Monseigneur Gabriel* for the Club des Cent's lunch here. It took me four days, and when I'd finished, I said to myself, 'Never again,' but before long I was beginning to want to try Tendret's third great pâté."

"*Le Chapeau* was a triumph," Mme. Dumaine said to me. "When it was brought in, the guests gasped with admiration."

"*Le Chapeau* is made of snipe, warbler, quail, and partridge—all left in a marinade for twelve hours—the livers of several chickens, brandy, and a great many other things," Dumaine said. "In the end, it is baked in a fine piecrust and served hot. The man it was named after, Monseigneur Gabriel Cortois de Quinsey, was made Bishop of Belley at the recommendation of Mme. de Pompadour. Seems that he was unusually good-looking." Dumaine chuckled and discarded his cigarette, which had gone out as it wobbled between his lips while he was talking. "So this year I'm finally going to make Tendret's third pâté. It's named after Adolphe Clerc, who was president of the court of Belley, and the crust is shaped like the hat of a judge. It is said to be the most difficult pâté of all to make—hare, woodcock, partridge, thrush, black truffles, and the livers of ducks. It will take me four or five days to prepare it, but at last I'll have done what I set out to do when I started in a kitchen forty-nine years ago."

"And next year you'll think of something even more difficult," Mme. Du-

maine said, and her husband beamed at her.

DUMAINE announced abruptly that he was going shopping and asked me if I'd like to go along. Mme. Dumaine seemed surprised, and as I started to follow her husband to the door, she whispered, "He's in a good mood. Maybe he'll let you into the kitchen after all." A couple—obviously French—had entered the lobby a few minutes earlier, and now the man stepped forward and, after greeting Dumaine with the deference all good Frenchmen show toward their *grands chefs*, asked if he and the lady with him might have lunch early, because they wanted to make Marseille that night.

"Will you be ready at twelve-fifteen?" Dumaine asked sternly.

The man nodded emphatically.

"Twelve-fifteen, then, *sans faute*," Dumaine said. He turned to his wife. "Did you make it absolutely clear to M. Raymond that he must be here at one?"

"Absolutely," Mme. Dumaine said.

Outside, Dumaine and I got into his car—a small Simca. As we drove off, he told me that M. Raymond had called from Paris two days before and ordered a *poularde à la vapeur d'un pot-au-feu*, to be served at one o'clock that afternoon; I could see that there was trouble in store for M. Raymond if he failed to be there on the dot. Dumaine looked at the sky, stuck his nose out the window and sniffed the air, and remarked that it was a good day for *coq au vin*—fresh and cool. It was an odd thing, he said, that although Saulieu is in the heart of what the French call a region of fat living, he finds himself obliged to buy mostly supplies that are shipped in from other parts of the country; in his opinion, not many of the local products are first-rate. His butter comes from Echiré, in the Département des Deux-Sèvres ("The best butter in France," he said); his beef from Charolles, the famous red-meat district in the Département de Saône-et-Loire, south of Saulieu; his chickens from Bresse; and most of his vegetables and fruits from Paris. (He gets his shellfish from Brittany and his sole and turbot from Boulogne, but, of course, Saulieu could hardly be expected to compete in these respects.) In general, Dumaine relies on Saulieu farmers only for his cream and his hams.

We drove past the old church and stopped in front of M. Gaumont's fruit shop. The proprietor, who had been

Neil Morgan WRITES ABOUT CALIENTE

As they race, jockeys may talk to horses. Also to other jockeys.

These latter remarks fail, with provocative consistency, to appear between quotation marks in the allowable writings of sport.

Even horses have been quoted by turf writers, whose archives are inexhaustible. But I defy you to point out in the records what Dick Wholey yelled at Willie Elliot on Phar Lap as the Australian wonder galloped past in the 13th race at Caliente on March 20, 1932.

I gather from Allen Carmichael, who rides at Caliente with the aplomb of a tonic water baron, that a jockey clattering up behind the leading horse may call in greeting to the rider ahead.

"Would you be good enough to make room for us, old man?" Or something akin to that.

When a jockey fails to heed such a request, we assume it is not because of shady gamesmanship, or lack of concern for the plight of another.

Carmichael recalls one jockey who in a career as midget wrestler had sustained ear injuries, leaving him immune to many vocal distractions of the race track.

The deaf one frequently set the pace clear to the finish line. He rarely responded to suggestions from the rear on ways and means to share his running path beside the rail.

Some incivility is implied in ignoring the pleas of a fellow worker, and I asked Carmichael why this unfortunate rider had not weighed in with a hearing aid.

I realized too late how slipshod was my thinking, how careless my inquiry.

Aghast, Carmichael strode off through the Caliente geranium patch.

"Surely you know?" he flung back. "The stewards do not allow batteries."

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Daily doubles in May paid $660.40 and $903.40 . . . In racing five furlongs at :58 1-5, two-year-old Take The Lead *set Caliente's fifth track record of the spring* . . . Harley McNamara, president of National Tea Co. of Chicago, visited Caliente with Art Sigmund and Charlie Wright. All three turned their backs on Caliente's traditional capon and wild rice to root home the winner in the "Fat Fools" purse.

standing in the doorway, came over and greeted Dumaine politely. We got out, and Dumaine, after unenthusiastically surveying a box of peaches in the window, asked whether the trucks had arrived from Paris.

Gaumont shook his head regretfully. "They should have been here hours ago," he said. "Now maybe they won't come at all. There was some sort of celebration in Paris yesterday, and it's always uncertain the day after a thing like that."

"People in France don't work hard any more," Dumaine said. "What about melons?"

"I've got some nice ones downstairs," Gaumont said, and preceded us down a stairway and into a low-ceilinged cellar. Dumaine stopped before a box of melons and gave them a clinical glance. I thought they looked delicious, but to judge by the stony expression on Dumaine's face, he considered them anything but that. He picked up a couple of them, weighed them in his hands, and broke one open. "The color is nice and the fibre is good, but they're too light," he said. "There's more water in them than sugar."

"It's been a bad year," Gaumont said abjectly.

"Still, these just won't do," Dumaine said. "Any good potatoes?"

Gaumont's potatoes met with a better reception, and Dumaine ordered thirty kilos.

As we walked back to the car, Dumaine said to me, "No peaches, no melons. I'll have to telephone to Paris and order direct. Expensive, but what else can I do?"

We stopped next in front of the butcher shop of M. Grosperrin, who has served Dumaine ever since he took over the Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or. Grosperrin, a sturdy, fair-haired man, was waiting on two housewives as we entered, but when he saw Dumaine he quickly turned them over to an assistant and came forward to shake hands.

"*Ça va, M. Dumaine?*"

"*Ça va.* Got any veal today?"

Grosperrin noticed Dumaine staring at a leg of veal that was hanging from a hook, and said, "No, no! That's not for you. No gray veal for M. Dumaine." He went into his refrigerator and came back with another leg of veal. "White!" he said proudly, holding the leg up for Dumaine's inspection. "White as the snow on Mont Blanc on a sunny morning in spring! This animal wasn't over six weeks old. Never saw the light of day. Never tasted grass."

Dumaine nodded. "That's better,"

he said, with a certain amount of cautious enthusiasm. "Now how about beef? A filet?"

Grosperrin smiled broadly, went back into his refrigerator, and came out staggering under a quarter of beef. As he threw it on his table, he mentioned a name to Dumaine that was meaningless to me. In its undressed condition, the slab of beef revealed no more than a heavy layer of fat, but Dumaine stared at it enthralled. "Ah!" he said, with a smile that made his eyes disappear. "What a beauty!"

I asked how they could be so sure, since they hadn't even seen the filet. Grosperrin, giving me a pitying look, replied, "This steer comes from one of the finest herds in the countryside around Charolles. Charolles—it is to us what Kans*ahs* Cit*ee* is to you in America. Right, M. Dumaine?"

"Right," said Dumaine.

"This steer was three years old," Grosperrin went on. "I know the owner. I know how he feeds his cattle. M. Dumaine knows, too. And this meat has not been frozen."

"Frozen food is dead food," Dumaine said.

"Exactly," said Grosperrin. "Do you understand now, Monsieur, why we don't have to see the filet to know how it will taste?"

"Cut it out and send it over with the veal," Dumaine said. "And try to find me some calf's liver for the end of the week."

"And another filet, too?" Grosperrin asked.

"I guess so," Dumaine replied. Then, turning to me, he said, "More and more of my customers ask for *grillades*. Very sad. I like broiled meat well enough myself, but the heart of our cuisine is our *plats préparés* and our sauces."

WE drove back to the hotel, where we found Mme. Dumaine at the desk, going over bills. Dumaine asked her to put through a phone call to Paris, and when she got the number he ordered some peaches and melons. Then his wife called a number in Dijon and he talked to a man there about wines. After hanging up, he told me he had been in Dijon recently, serving as a member of a three-man jury for a contest that was run off as part of a culinary exposition. "We had to sample over a hundred dishes, all of them prepared by young *sous-chefs*," he said. "I wish my friends who are always telling me that our young people aren't interested in cooking any more could have been there. I met plenty of young men in Dijon who

love the métier. We awarded the first prize to a *poularde farcie à la mousse de jambon*—a classic theme, well executed. Still, I'm afraid that it lacked simplicity. *La chose nette, c'est la plus difficile.* Take Fernand Point's *gratin de queues d'écrevisses*. There was a symphony of simplicity—the pure fragrance of the crayfish! But nowadays simplicity has become unfashionable. Chefs are putting alcohol into everything they can think of. Our cuisine has become *alcoolisée*. Everything is flaming—a spectacle for the eyes rather than for the palate. Alcohol should be used most sparingly in cooking. My crêpes Suzette are no pyrotechnical display, but they taste good. The sugar in them is ground to the consistency of flour. That's the important thing in crêpes Suzette, not the flames."

I asked Dumaine if as a young man he, too, had loved the métier. "Always," he replied. "As far back as I can remember, I liked to hang around my mother's kitchen. Our house was near the Loire, and my father and I would go out with our rods and come home with fresh fish for my mother to cook. She made a wonderful *friture de goujons*. Her *beignets* were marvellous. And the things she could do with potatoes! We didn't have much money, but my mother, like so many French housewives, had the happy knack of getting superb results with inexpensive ingredients."

Falling into a reminiscent mood, Dumaine told me that all this was in Digoin, in the Département de Saône-et-Loire, where he was born on August 26, 1895. One day, when he was eleven years old, a family friend asked his father, who was a pharmacist's assistant, what plans he had made for his son's future. Dumaine *père* confessed that he hadn't given much thought to the matter. "Why not a cook?" said the friend. "At least, he'll never be out of work in France and he'll always have something to eat." Dumaine's father thought this an excellent idea and soon found his son a job as an apprentice in the local pâtisserie.

"Naturally, I was pleased," Dumaine said. "And I suppose, in a way, I am much indebted to my first employer for teaching me the fundamentals of cooking. But I still feel that I owe the most to my mother. I learned from her what it means to plan a dish with care and to prepare it with affection."

"*Maman* was a remarkable woman," Mme. Dumaine said. "I learned a great deal from her, too. She and my father-

in-law often came here to enjoy their son's success. During those visits, Alexandre and his father loved to sit down over some simple dish and a bottle of honest *vin du pays*."

"*Papa* shared a good Savigny-les-Beaune with me a few hours before he died," Dumaine said.

As an apprentice, Dumaine worked hard. The hours were long. On days when there was a fair, a wedding, a banquet, or a reception, he would start work at two in the morning; on other days, he started at four or five. At night, he had to clean the stove and scrub the kitchen, and he also had to scare up time to cut wood for the stove. After a year at the pâtisserie, he switched to a job as an apprentice at the Hôtel de la Poste, in nearby Paray-le-Monial, where he was taught the importance of fresh ingredients by being sent to the hotel garden every day after lunch to pick vegetables for the evening meal. Next, he moved on to the Hôtel Carlton, in Vichy, and from there to Paris, where he worked first at the Café de Paris, on the Avenue de l'Opéra, under the celebrated Léopold Mourier, and then at the Elysée Palace Hôtel. Dumaine volunteered for service in the First World War; he fought at the front, was decorated with the Croix de Guerre, and eventually wound up in the kitchen of an officers' mess. The outstanding event of his military-culinary career was a luncheon he cooked for Clemenceau and General Franchet d'Espèrey, the French and Allied Commander. After the war, he was *chef de cuisine* at, successively, the Grand Hôtel des Bains, in Granville; the Hôtel Louvois, in Paris; the Royal Bellevue, in St. Cast; and the Splendid, in Pougues-les-Eaux. In 1922, he was appointed director and *chef de cuisine* of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique's Grands Hôtels des Circuits du Sahara, which owned forty-four hotels in North Africa. The Dumaines spent nine years in that desolate region—much of the time in Michelet and Biskra—struggling with extraordinary logistic and gastronomic problems.

"The hotel in Michelet was at an altitude of twelve hundred metres," Mme. Dumaine told me. "Sometimes the road would be blocked by snow and the supply trucks couldn't get through, but my husband always managed to put together something to delight the guests. Some of them still remember his *gratin de volaille ivoire*. Once, when we were cut off from the outside world, Maurice Maeterlinck, who happened to be staying with us, kept a record in his diary of all my husband's menus, heading

them 'First day of siege,' 'Second day of siege,' and so on."

"We had to distill our drinking water," Dumaine said. "We had to produce our own electricity. And we almost never had ice. In the summertime, we would send small expeditions up into the Djurdjura Mountains, where there is snow most of the year, and they would bring back bags of it to help out with our desperate problem of refrigeration. Needless to say, there was no fresh cream or butter."

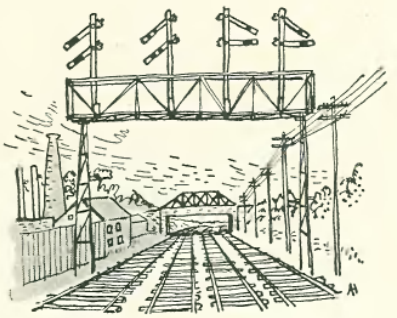
In 1931, Dumaine heard that the Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or was for sale. He made a trip to Saulieu to look the place over and liked it at once. The Transatlantique people were reluctant to see him go and held out the offer of better things if he would stay with them, but after his lean years in North Africa, he succumbed to the lure of Saulieu's abundance of fresh cream and butter. Saulieu has been his headquarters ever since. The Dumaines have a house in the country, near Digoin, but they rarely feel that they can take a day off to visit it. In the fall of 1934, Dumaine visited the United States, crossing the Atlantic as a guest of the French Line. He talked food aboard the Ile-de-France with the ship's famous chef, Gaston Magrin, and in New York with Oscar of the Waldorf. One of Dumaine's experiences in New York was described in the *Herald Tribune* by Joseph Alsop, Jr., then a young reporter on that paper, who wrote, in part, "Alexandre Dumaine observed the progress of cooking yesterday at a four-hour luncheon of the Club des Jeudis at the Hotel Lafayette. M. Dumaine emerged from the soft ordeal smiling benignly, assured that civilization had spread even to these distant shores."

IT was now almost eleven o'clock, and from out behind the dining room came the clatter of dishes and silverware. "I do wish they would do that a little more quietly!" said Mme. Dumaine, and then explained to me that a long table was being set in a hall back there for the communal lunch that the proprietor and his wife regularly share with the twenty-three members of the staff. Most of the employees live in the hotel, and all of them eat together with their employers, at eleven in the morning and at six at night. The Dumaines call them their family, and the majority have been with the house for many years. The headwaitress, a pleasant-looking, dark-haired woman named Erminda Bonino, started with the Dumaines twenty-three years

ago. Since then, her husband has joined her on the staff as a waiter. Their seventeen-year-old son, Jean, camouflaging his youth under an Adolphe Menjou mustache, helps his parents as an assistant to the waiters, and their nine-year-old daughter, Elisabeth, who, I was told, had gone away for a short vacation and was expected back any moment, is adored by M. and Mme. Dumaine, who have no children of their own.

I asked Dumaine whether he favored his wife's sister with examples of his cooking during his annual visit to Nice. He replied that he wouldn't dream of doing any such thing, and that he much enjoys the bourgeois dishes prepared by his sister-in-law—dishes like *tripes à la mode de Caen* and *blanquette de veau à l'ancienne*. "*La grande cuisine* is possible only in professional surroundings," he said. "At home, one should never attempt to imitate the dishes of a great restaurant. And, alas, *la grande cuisine* is not for the professional to enjoy. When you must taste all the time for your guests, you are rarely hungry. That's the sacrifice we chefs must make for the sake of our profession. Yesterday, for lunch I had a lamb chop and rice, a salad, and a little cheese, and for dinner only soup and an egg. I hardly ever have more than one glass of wine at mealtime and I never touch hard liquor. I smoke constantly, but I don't inhale, and the Gauloises haven't damaged my palate. I wouldn't think of serving my guests even such a routine dish as *poularde Bressane truffée Sainte Alliance* or *fonds d'artichauts sauce d'écrevisses* without tasting it to be sure that it was absolutely right."

In my famished state, the dishes didn't sound routine to me, and I must have looked the way I felt, because almost at once Dumaine said, "You are hungry? That's good. Your menu has been prepared." Since he seemed to be in a benevolent mood, I asked timidly if I might join him in the kitchen before my lunch. He nodded, and said he would call me. Then he went out back to cut a rump steak for the family's



lunch, and his wife volunteered to show me the cellar.

The Dumaine cellar contains four hundred and fifty different wines and twenty-seven different champagnes. Mme. Dumaine showed me a section of it that her husband had walled up to conceal many bottles of precious wine shortly before the Wehrmacht entered Saulieu, on June 16, 1940. The Germans carried away two truckloads of wine from the hotel, but they never found the cache. During the war, the hotel was open but the restaurant wasn't, because, much as Dumaine missed his beloved cooking, he didn't want to go in for the black-market buying that would have been necessary to keep operating. But many a Resistance fighter was secretly served a *bifteck* and *pommes frites* by the *grand chef* of the Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or. After the Germans left, the wall was removed, but a number of the fine wines it concealed are still there—all the great vintage years of La Romanée-Conti back to 1926, and an excellent selection of Chambolle-Musigny Les Amoureuses, Charmes-Chambertin, Clos de Vougeot, Romanée St.-Vivant, Volnay Clos des Ducs, Vosne-Romanée Les Grands Suchots, Chambertin Clos de Bèze, and Vosne-Romanée Les Gaudichots. There is a smaller but still impressive selection of Bordeaux wines; I saw Château d'Yquem '92 and '00, Château Haut-Brion '06, '28, and '29, Château Cheval Blanc '24, and Château Ausone '16. Quite a few of the wines in the Dumaine cellar are held in reserve for favorite guests, and not listed on the restaurant's wine card. "I always try to discourage strangers from ordering one of these irreplaceable bottles," Mme. Dumaine said. "The other night, a party of Americans ordered a Romanée-Conti '29, which is listed at 9,500 francs [$27]. One lady put water in it. It was very, very sad, Monsieur."

Upstairs, a bell rang and I heard Dumaine's voice shouting "*A table!*" Mme. Dumaine said nervously that she would have to go; her husband was always put out when any member of the family was late for lunch. Back in the lobby, she hurriedly brought me a large black loose-leaf notebook, with "Souvenirs Professionels, by Alexandre Dumaine" written on its cover, and then left to join the others at the long table. As I turned the book's pages, all of them handwritten, I discovered that most of the entries had been made by the stated author's diffident wife. In an introduction, dated June 24, 1933, she had written: "Dear Tempest, I wish I were

a magician, so that I could pass on to young people something of the fervor of your labors and aspirations, something of your achievements and the objectives toward which you strive incessantly, and thus re-create for their benefit the struggles of your life. Struggles that have given both of us a most wonderful adventure, a life so rich in understanding and so full of the only things that we can take with us . . ."

The French couple who had asked for an early lunch came into the lobby and sat down, talking animatedly of the meal they were about to enjoy. Other people drifted in and huddled over a typed menu that was lying on a table. When the family's lunch was over, the employees took up their battle stations in the kitchen, the dining room, the cellar, and elsewhere. Then Mme. Dumaine appeared, followed by her husband, who, after anxiously asking her what she thought could be delaying Elisabeth's return, gave me an imperial nod to follow him back to the kitchen.

THE kitchen in which Dumaine has produced major culinary masterpieces for almost a quarter of a century is only twenty-seven feet long and eighteen feet wide, yet in it he can readily prepare meals for up to eighty guests at a time. ("If we try to serve more, it's not good for them or for us," he says.) As for its appearance, it could hardly be described as an American bride's dream. The floor is dark and the walls are the color of second-rate veal. In the middle of the room, taking up much of the space, stands a massive black coal range. In the rear is a small sink. Iron pans and copper pots are suspended on hooks from the ceiling; silver trays are stacked up on a long table running along one wall. There are several high windows on one side, and a fan; on the opposite side, an open door leads directly into the hotel's garage, which at mealtimes becomes probably the sweetest-smelling place on earth to store a car. In front of the range, facing a corridor that leads to the dining room, is a table at which all dishes must be subjected to Dumaine's critical inspection before leaving the kitchen.

The guests' orders are taken by Mme. Dumaine, who writes them down on slips of paper, making two carbons; one copy is left at the table, one goes to the kitchen, and the third to the cashier, who sits behind the desk in the lobby. When an order slip arrives in the kitchen, it is hung on one of a series of hooks near the table at which

Dumaine inspects the dishes; when the order has been executed, the slip is transferred to one of another series of hooks. Both sets of hooks bear numbers corresponding to those of the tables in the dining room, enabling Dumaine to see at a glance what the guests at each table have ordered and whether or not they have been served. "*La grande cuisine* is fifty per cent fine cooking and fifty per cent organization," Dumaine told me as he explained this setup. "My kitchen is run like a railroad." He was standing near his command post, from which he could survey not only the outgoing dishes and the order slips but the range as well. Once in a while, he would glance at a white clock on the wall—"our most important piece of equipment," he said. Behind him was a blackboard, on which he had chalked some shopping reminders, and tacked to it was a list of meals specially ordered in advance. On it I read, "Lunch, 13 hours, M. Raymond. *Poularde vapeur*, the rest to be ordered on arrival."

Dumaine had only four employees, all of them young men, to help him in the kitchen. The oldest was André Claire, twenty-six, who has been with him for six years and is capable of carrying on for him during his rare absences. Of the others, one was a *saucier* and two were apprentices. Dumaine-trained men never have trouble finding good jobs after leaving him. One of his graduates is now at the Café de la Paix in Paris, another is in Deauville, and a third is the chef on a French Line boat.

It was almost noon, the kitchen was spotless, and everything was ready. The fish and shellfish had been cleaned, the lobster had been cooked and was in the icebox, the vegetables had been prepared and were ready to be cooked, and the *coq au vin* was tender. On the range stood four large pots, in which the principal sauces were making satisfyingly bubbly noises. In one of the pots was a cream-colored sauce mousseline, looking light and airy. Dumaine stuck the middle finger of his left hand in, tasted, and invited me to do the same. I did, and found the sauce delicious.

"It's all in knowing how," Dumaine said. "You won't find the essential ingredients—imagination and devotion—in cookbooks. Anyone might think he could make this sauce by simply beating twelve egg yolks and a litre of fresh cream quickly over the fire—being careful not to let the mixture boil up—and then adding the juice of the *poularde*, skimming off the fat, and seasoning with nutmeg, salt, and pepper. That will make a sauce mousseline, but it won't be

this sauce. People praise our *quenelles de brochet* because they're so light, but why are they so light? Not just because they're made of mousse of pike, with a sauce Mornay, a little Chablis, and strained mushrooms. No, there's more to it than that, but what that is you find out only after years of diligent search and hard work, and no one else can find it out for you."

Dumaine picked up a large spoon and began to skim the fat off the surface of another sauce. "One can't be careful enough," he said. "Without a thorough *dégraissage*, the sauce will be heavy and indigestible. Fine cooking must avoid dishes that are too rich. That's the sort of thing that worries me whenever I'm not on hand to do the job myself. André knows how to make a sauce, but will he be sure to skim off the very last drop of fat? If he fails to, the clients in the dining room will say that Dumaine's cooking has become heavy and bad for the liver. In the music of the cuisine, the sauces are the melodies. Some chefs use as many as four different sauces in a single dish, but do they blend them into a harmonious symphony? That's where the trick lies. Nothing is ever perfect. I've made my sauce for *coq au vin* for thirty years and I'm only just now beginning to get the proper balance. This morning, by the way, it came out especially well. Here, try."

Again I tasted, and again I could find no fault.

"Thirty years to achieve that," Dumaine said. "Yet some young men think they know all the answers after two years of apprenticeship. When my boys move on to other jobs, they know the rudiments of technique and the laws of chemistry. Whether they'll not only work hard but bring to their work that extra spark that distinguishes the good cook from the mediocre one there's no way of telling." He fixed each of the boys in turn with a penetrating stare, and there was an uncomfortable silence in the kitchen. Then Dumaine turned to inspect the two other sauces, one of them for the lobster and the other for ham.

The silence was broken by the arrival of Mme. Bonino bringing the first order. It was for a party of four; evidently the Marseille-bound couple I had seen in the lobby were not the only early diners. Dumaine took the order slip from Mme. Bonino and read out "*Une terrine, une. Une langouste, une. Deux jambons crème, deux*" in a singsong voice. His boys repeated the orders and swung into action with the efficiency of a well-trained gun crew. One opened

the icebox and brought out a plate of cooked lobster meat. Dumaine selected four large pieces and put them in an oval earthenware casserole. The *saucier* spread the sauce over them, sprinkled finely grated cheese on the surface, and slid the casserole into a *salamandre*—a small stove with an overhead gas burner, for quick broiling. André meanwhile cut a few slices off a rosy ham, put them in a casserole, covered them with a little bouillon, and set the casserole on the range. Then he poured the appropriate sauce over the ham, added grated cheese, and transferred the casserole to the *salamandre*. From a small adjoining room, where there was a cold buffet, a pantryman brought a terrine of pâté. Within three minutes, the dishes were ready, inspected by Dumaine, and taken away by Mme. Bonino's son. There hadn't been a superfluous movement.

More orders were coming in. "Table Nine will get the timbale in exactly twenty minutes," Dumaine called out, glancing at the clock.

A waiter brought an order for a *chateaubriand* for two, Table 17, *à point*, and had barely left the kitchen before one of the apprentices had whisked a filet of beef onto a table and Dumaine had cut off a thick double steak.

Mme. Bonino hurried in, said, "Number Fourteen is now sitting down at the table," and hurried out again. Dumaine consulted one of the slips and shouted, "*Deux bisques, deux!* And get the *poulardes* ready for M. Raymond and"—nodding in my direction—"for Monsieur."

At this, the other apprentice drew a big earthenware vessel forward from the back of the range. André produced a terrine containing two small but beautifully fattened chickens that had been lying all night in a marinade. Thin slices of black truffles had been inserted under the skin over their breasts.

"*Voilà votre poularde!*" Dumaine said to me, his hand outstretched in the manner of a guide at the Louvre showing a visitor the "Mona Lisa." He placed the two fowl on a tripod and lowered it into the big earthenware vessel. Finally, he put a cover on the vessel and sealed it by tying a white napkin around it.

"The *pot-au-feu* has been simmering in that vessel only since eight this morning," Dumaine said. "Not very long, when you recall Escoffier's rule that a consommé should be on the fire for at least twelve hours, but in this case

we're using it only for the aroma. For one hour exactly, the *poulardes* will be left to steam in the *pot-au-feu*. They're never allowed to touch any liquid. It is now twenty-five minutes to one. At twenty-five minutes to two, your *poularde à la vapeur d'um pot-au-feu* will be opened at your table and served to you, and at the same moment M. Raymond will be served his. Do you now understand the importance of being on time?"

I said I didn't see how Dumaine could be sure that the chicken would be just right when it was taken out of the vessel. "I know the temperature inside the vessel and the exact weight of the chickens," he told me. "A simple physical formula." At his request, one of the boys brought out an uncooked chicken. Dumaine showed it to me; it was tagged with a metal label and a serial number. "*Le poulet Reine*," he said. "Finest fowl from Bresse, where the best poultry in France is raised. They keep their birds constantly cooped up and feed them by stuffing corn down their throats."

A waitress came in and said, "Table Fifteen is sitting down."

Dumaine turned back to the range. For a while, the only words spoken were his commands and the echoing of them by his men. Then, suddenly, Dumaine flew into a rage. He had spotted one of the apprentices mashing some potatoes improperly. Dumaine gave him a severe scolding. Had the youth forgotten that in mashing potatoes one should always bear down on them with vertical thrusts and never stir them with a rotary movement? Dumaine finished mashing the potatoes himself, and added butter and cream; thereafter, he vowed, he alone would prepare the mashed potatoes, a very difficult dish.

There was a commotion outside, and a slim little girl with dark hair and dark eyes burst into the kitchen and threw her arms around Dumaine's legs. She was Elisabeth. Dumaine dropped a spoon he was holding, lifted the child up, and embraced her tenderly. Then, as he put her down, he gave her a sharp glance. "*Alors, alors*, you've lost weight," he said. "Didn't they feed you properly on your vacation? *A table! Vite!*" Elisabeth ran out. Dumaine looked after her with moist eyes. A moment later, he turned and, seeing that the rest of us in the kitchen had been watching him, said brusquely, "That girl always comes breaking in here in the middle of the service. She was born here just as we were serving lunch. André, make her some *jambon à la*

crème. She loves it. What are you staring at, all of you? Back to work!"

AT one o'clock, Dumaine told me to take my place in the dining room. Approaching it through the lobby, I was met at the entrance by Mme. Dumaine, who was holding a menu, a wine card, and an order pad under one arm. She welcomed me with a smile and led me to a small table between two windows. The dining room is in the same country-inn tradition as the lobby; the floor is tiled, the walls are wood-panelled, an old-fashioned buffet off to one side holds bottles of apéritif and cognac, and near the entrance is a large table on which there is a display of lush peaches and pears; an assortment of cheeses, their various names written on tiny markers stuck into them; bread cut into thick pieces; slabs of butter; and a luscious Morvan ham, with a knife invitingly at its side.

When I entered the dining room, about forty guests were already there, seated at tables that were spaced at comfortable intervals. A delicate aroma of good food and wine hovered in the air, the silver was brightly polished, the plates were thick, and my napkin, of rough linen, smelled fresh and clean. There were no flowers on the tables; their fragrance, Dumaine feels, would detract from that of the food. Mme. Dumaine apprehensively told me that M. Raymond hadn't yet arrived from Paris—and it was only half an hour before his *poularde* would be ready. She sighed, wished me good appetite, and walked away.

Mme. Bonino brought me bread and butter. A pleasant, refreshing Chablis was served in an ice bucket. The Dumaines are proud of their inexpensive *vins du pays*—Chablis, Pouilly-Fuissé, Fleurie, and Morgon—from Burgundy and the nearby Beaujolais country. I was so hungry that I ate two pieces of bread and butter, which is a bad mistake when dining at Dumaine's; with the stimulating wine, bread and butter are almost a meal in themselves. The butter, hand-churned, had a slight hazelnut flavor; the bread was hand-kneaded and fresh.

My lunch formally began with a delicious *pâté maison*, and this was followed by *jambon à la crème gratiné*. Dumaine is the only *grand chef* in France who bothers with ham, but I suspect that those who consider all pork fit for nothing better than the *cuisine bourgeoise* would change their minds if they could taste a creation like the one that was put before me. This ham is served with

a sauce that is an essence of tomatoes and shallots cooked slowly in white wine, to which a sauce Aurore (a béchamel, plus tomatoes) is added, and the result is then covered with fresh cream and fresh butter, and *gratiné*. In Prague, where I lived in my earlier years, they are proud of their hams, but until I tasted my *jambon à la crème*, I never knew how good ham could be.

There was a quick change of plates and silver, and then I was served an *œuf Toupinel*. This was the shell of a baked potato filled with a *purée de pommes* (mashed vertically, of course, not with a rotary motion) and a ragout of mushrooms and truffles cooked in Madeira, the whole topped off with a poached egg—not too hard, not too soft—and sauce Mornay. It was surely the most elaborately prepared potato I'd ever eaten, and it convinced me that Point had made no mistake in his estimate of Dumaine's genius.

At twenty-five minutes to two, Mme. Bonino's husband and their son brought in the large earthenware vessel and put it on a small table next to mine. People stopped eating and looked on in a respectful silence as Mme. Bonino stepped up to it, removed the white napkin that had been tied around it, and lifted the lid with a flourish, releasing a most delicious fragrance of consommé, truffles, herbs, and *poularde*. An old, goateed, bemonocled gentleman who was lunching alone at a table near mine and was obviously in love with his bottle of Châteaux Margaux dropped his monocle and drew in his breath in a long, soft, appreciative whistle.

The waiter lifted out one of the chickens and began to carve it. When he had finished and left, I tentatively sampled the dish. The truffled meat was indescribably tender, yet there was no suspicion of its having been overcooked, and it was exquisitely permeated with the steamy aroma of the *pot-au-feu*. As if that were not enough, there was Dumaine's very light sauce mousseline to complement the flavor, and an accompanying array of tender young vegetables. With it all, a pungent Morgon le Py was served in a very large glass, and next to this was a common-sense bottle of vichy.

As I was finishing my *poularde*, Mme. Dumaine stopped by my table to ask how I had liked it. I told her that it had left nothing to be desired. She sighed. M. Raymond had not arrived from Paris, she said; his *poularde* was ruined, and M. Dumaine was very, very angry. "And when he is angry . . ." she

added, raising her eyes imploringly toward the ceiling. "But he's right, of course, Monsieur. He works for hours to make this a fine dish, and then—" She shrugged, and walked away.

Later, after a mild cheese—Château Double-Crème—and some pastry and fruit, I sat down to have coffee with the Dumaines in the lobby. The lunch-time rush and excitement were over; from the dining room, where a few people were still sitting in a contented daze, the odor of cigars and liqueurs drifted out to us. Dumaine had the tired but satisfied expression of an actor after a stellar performance. M. Raymond had finally shown up, at half past two. He had been informed that he would not be served, and had left with an empty stomach. Dumaine was pleased; M. Raymond would remember his lesson. "Why should people be an hour late for lunch?" he said, lighting a Gauloise. "They wouldn't dare be an hour late for Mass or for the opera."

"M. Raymond claimed he was delayed en route," Mme. Dumaine said soothingly.

"One allows time for delays when one has ordered a *poularde à la vapeur*," Dumaine declared, with the air of a man who is stating a basic truth.

"Certainly," said his wife.

"What will happen to the *poularde*?" I asked.

"It will be part of the family's dinner tonight," Dumaine replied. "Too bad, for by that time it will be far from perfect, but we cannot let it be wasted. Now, will you spend the night with us, and, if so, what about *your* dinner?"

I said that Marseille could well wait until tomorrow but that right at the moment dinner was the thing furthest from my mind. Dumaine hardly heard me. His expression was that of a visionary as he began, "Of course, your dinner will be light. Mustn't eat *too* much. A soup to start with, or maybe a piece of melon? Then an *omelette aux fines herbes*—excellent for your health. Or a *timbale de quenelles de brochet Eminence. Ah, c'est magnifique!* And afterward, just a *chateaubriand* with a béarnaise, or a saddle of lamb with young *haricots verts frais au beurre maître d'hôtel* . . ."

—JOSEPH WECHSBERG

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5. In round numbers, what is Girl Scout membership today?

5. Today there are 2,300,000 members of the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Of these, 1,750,000 are girls.—*The American Girl.*

That's not enough.