

He Wanted to Cook, and He Did

INTERNATIONAL CHEF: Paris, New York, London, Monte Carlo, Lisbon, Frankfurt. By John Dingle. 253 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$3.95.

By REX STOUT

THIS book fooled me. A book titled "International Chef" would surely be about cooking and would therefore have many recipes. But it hasn't. It has only one, for plank steak—and it is as good a one as you can find.

The book is not so much about cooking as about cooking as a career. John Dingle, whose father was a newspaper compositor in Bristol, England, at the age of 14 picked up an ambition to become a noted chef more or less by chance, but once he had it he never turned it loose. He has kept his tenacious grip on it for more than half a century, through hardship and overwhelming difficulties, against seemingly hopeless odds, despite all obstacles. He worked in London and Lisbon and Frankfurt, at the Hermitage in Monte Carlo, the

Mr. Stout is the creator of the famous detective-gourmet Nero Wolfe.

Majestic in Paris, the Ritz (now no more, alas) in New York. His toughest piece of luck came when he had got firmly established as lord of the kitchen and table at Woodmansten Inn, Pelham Parkway, New York. It was shot from under him by the landlord, who had been gratefully taking his recompense for a decade in *haute cuisine* for himself and friends, with no records kept, and who suddenly demanded payment of ten years' rent in cash. It is permissible to hope that the wretch got ulcers.

There are many fascinating details of conditions and customs in all kinds and grades of kitchens, from a working-class coffee house in Bristol to a world-famous hotel with seventy chefs. Mr. Dingle describes the technique of "fiddling," which the management calls pilfering. He tells of the manifestations of snobbery among the men in white aprons—valuable documentation for students of that widespread disease. Jealousy too; the functions and milieu of a large kitchen staff offer splendid opportunities for the green-eyed character to get

in his licks, and it is just as well that the customers don't know about it. But if the vices are around, so are the virtues, and Mr. Dingle chronicles them too.

There are useful hints, such as, if one of your children likes beef, another lamb and another pork, how to serve all three from the same joint; or how to use a trussing needle and your tongue to test the progress of a roast you are not sure about. There are cogent remarks like, "There is a great psychological difference between using a foreign language to order something for which you will pay and using it to get a job for which you want to be paid."

At the end Mr. Dingle is the owner and operator of the Hawthorns, a large hotel in Bristol, where he was born, as well as some 600 acres of land near by where he raises beef and pork and fowl and vegetables. It may not be particularly thrilling to contemplate him in his present comfortable glory, but it is a real treat to read his book and accompany him over the bumps on his way to it.

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