

here little quotes. Right in the middle of nowhere somebody'll say something real spooky that don't seem to have anything to do with anything, but that don't matter—it's the end, girls, finis. Naturally they never have any trouble if an article needs to be padded out a column or two so it will get through the ads over onto the page where them little quotes are. There's always three or four hundred words lying around the office, like say it's a piece about a horticulturist, well, they tell you what his daughter's kids are named, the one who married the acoustical engineer, and how old they are and where they go to school. Or it might be a description about how many different strokes the cleaning ladies use when they mop up Penn Station at night, that sort of thing. I'll never forget what old Copey learned us all back in English 'A' at Harvard about the power of a seemingly insignificant detail suddenly to illuminate an entire character or situation. 'You must never forget,' old Copey used to tell us, 'that even when something *seems* dull and unimportant on the surface, there is always a possibility that it really *is*!' But what really bugs me about *The Dubuquer*," the aforementioned observer of that publication's hebdomadal redaction is reported to have remarked as he turned up the fur collar of his black leather jacket and shuffled ambivalently out into a gentle spring rain to take his place in the next-to-last Carey limousine of a funeral cortege, "is how people just go on talking and talking without anybody asking them to."

—ROBERT BINGHAM

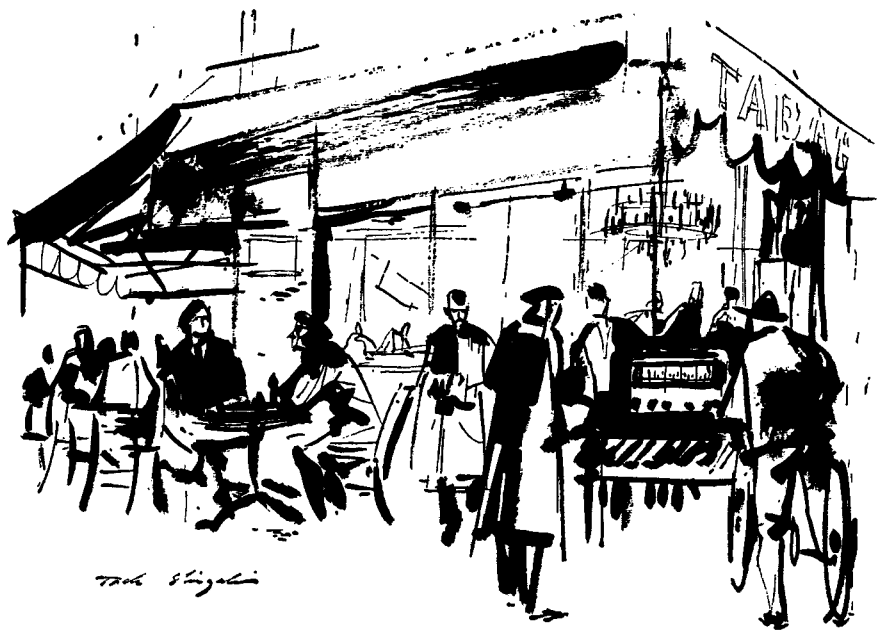
(This is the last in a series of one hundred and seventeen articles on Mr. Welter.)

WHICH PAGE D'YA READ?

Dressing, for the Mayor, is not the matter of picking and choosing the right combination of suit, tie, shirt, socks, and shoes that it is for many men; he is color blind . . . —Page 40, the *New Yorker*, February 2, 1957.

The Mayor's memory keeps a record not only of people's names and faces and the trivia of people's conversations but of the letters people write him. "You know," he will say to Miss Kelly, "about six, seven months ago I had a letter from that fellow who called this morning. It was on white paper, and it had a little yellow thing on top, and blue engraving."—Pages 65 and 66 of the same magazine, same issue.

TRAVEL



Stars to Steer By

RAY ALAN

WHATEVER the weather, France possesses two infallible harbingers of spring: the annual quarrel between the ministry of education and the farmers and *hôteli*ers over the dates of the public-school system's summer vacation, and the bright-red blossoming of the *Guide Michelin* on every bookstall.

The Guide's *raison d'être* is to create good will for Michelin tires. (It is as well to stress this, as American and British newcomers to it are apt to be puzzled by its obsession with tire pressures and its inclusion of tire stores among the sights and essential addresses of French resorts. "Do they really expect one to take home a tire as a souvenir of Antibes?") It all started just sixty years ago when a tire manufacturer named André Michelin foresaw that the new national sport arising from the spread of automobile ownership in France would be not so much *automobilisme* as *gastromobilisme*. In the list of Michelin tire dealers that his salesmen gave to any motorist who would take one, he included the names and addresses of nearby hotels and restaurants. Subsequently a mention of

sights and curiosities was added, and the first town plans made their appearance. The list became a brochure, the brochure a book. The print order grew from three thousand in 1900 to fifty thousand in 1910. But, as architects of welfare states are continually discovering, twentieth-century man is as yet too primitive to appreciate what he does not have to pay for. Garage hands used the Guide as a wedge; hotelkeepers hung it in the toilet.

In 1931 André Michelin put on sale what were claimed to be the first folding road maps for motorists and decreed that henceforth his Guide would be sold. Skeptics predicted early disillusionment on both counts, but motorists promptly lined up to buy the guidance they had scorned when it was free. Nearly three decades later, his firm's road maps are still generally considered the best in Europe, and the 1958 edition of the Guide (subsidized by Michelin to the tune of \$100,000) sold 280,000 copies. The official instructions for starting most French cars are now: "(1) Put gear lever to neutral; (2) Switch on ignition; (3) Check that

the horn works; (4) Check that the *Guide Michelin* is in the car; (5) Pull/push the *démarreur* . . .”

THE GUIDE's formula could not be simpler. The usual introductory pages are followed by a brief gastronomic geography of France. (Scandalously, the cheese and regional-specialties maps have recently been suppressed in order to make room for German and Italian translations of the introductory section: if that doesn't wreck Little Europe I don't know what will.) Then every significant French town and thousands of villages are listed in alphabetical order.

Beneath each entry some fifty hieroglyphs and almost as many abbreviations and typographical tricks indicate the administrative status of the place, its population and altitude, the local sights, where to buy tires, where to find a mechanic, and the logistics, specialities, and prices of a cross section of hotels and restaurants. A tiny tap, for instance, means “cold running water only,” a pitcher “no running water,” and a candle “no electric light.” Three crossed forks and spoons, printed in black, mean that a restaurant is “very comfortable.” Printed in red, they indicate that the establishment is exceptionally “pleasant”; and from the fact that a restaurant a hundred yards away from where I am writing got itself promoted recently from black to red merely by acquiring a new proprietress, I deduce that they also mean “*La patronne est une belle blonde*.”

Stars guide the reader's footsteps—or, preferably, his Michelin tires—to memorable monuments and meals. Three stars mean “well worth the journey”; two “worth a detour.” It is the culinary stars that matter—and cause the *Guide Michelin* to be snapped up and pondered over. Small-town political crises and shattering domestic dramas swirl around them. Cooks who have dropped a star have been known to call at the local tire agency with a carving knife. When the Hôtel Fourcade brought disgrace to Castelnau, proud capital of the *cassoulet*, by losing its star, outraged local patriots were restrained only by reports that there were heavy troop movements in the vicinity.

Unique among mortals is the plump Mère Brazier, recipient of five Michelin stars annually for the last ten years—three for her restaurant at the Col de la Luère and two for the one she runs thirteen miles away in Lyon. If she is the queen of restaurateurs, the acknowledged king until his death in 1955 was Fernand Point, owner and chef of the Pyramide at Vienne, just south of Lyon. Madame Point has kept up his standards—an extraordinary achievement—and the Pyramide still has three stars. The only three-star husband-and-wife team in the Guide today is that of M. and Mme. Dumaine, at the Côte d'Or in Saulieu, whose *truite au Chambertin* and *jambon à la crème* and fabulous cellar draw dinner parties from Paris, 162 miles away.

The 1959 Guide awards three stars to only eleven restaurants in the whole of France, four more than in 1951 (the first “normal” postwar year), and two stars to fifty-seven, six more than in 1951. But the total of one-star restaurants has shrunk in eight years from 675 to 577, and the Guide's seven anonymous inspectors who, caterpillar-like, eat their way systematically across France every two years to keep the score, grumble that French cookery is in decline. Restaurateurs complain that it is the inspectors who are getting liverish. Still others snarl that the Guide as such is to blame: by encouraging a scramble for stars it is imposing uniform culinary standards over the whole country.

The Guide has space to list only about twelve per cent of France's eighty thousand hotels and restaurants, and five hundred are ejected and five hundred newcomers included every year. Mere inclusion boosts turnover by ten per cent, but a star brings the average restaurateur forty per cent more customers and adds appreciably to the value of his business. (Even the famous Tour d'Argent of Paris rocked in 1952 when the *Guide Michelin* snuffed out one of its three stars, and made a herculean effort to climb back to grace: no one has ever eaten better at the Tour d'Argent than in 1952-1953.) It is natural that restaurateurs should study the Michelin inspectors' tastes and concentrate on the specialties that light up stars.

On this point the Guide is vulner-

able. The seven inspectors pay only a minimum of homage to regional specialties and do not appear greatly to enjoy the beef, pork, and veal they encounter; but they are crazy about chicken, crayfish, lobster, and pike. The Elysian village of Talloires (pop. 754), in Haute-Savoie, besides enjoying a three-star situation by the Lake of Annecy, possesses four starred restaurants (one of which is the famous Auberge du Père Bise): at three of them *queues d'écrevisses* get a special mention. *Queues d'écrevisses* are also featured at the Col de la Luère and Vienne, and at humbler restaurants dotted like steppingstones across France from the Pyrenees to the Rhine. Wherever pike are within snapping distance, one finds the inspectors tossing out stars in praise of *quenelles de brochet*. The restaurateur shrewd enough to kill two fish with one stone and offer *quenelles de brochet au coulis d'écrevisses* (like M. Fernandez in Nancy, M. Rey in Annecy, and M. Blanchard in Pouilly) is sure of his place in the Michelin firmament.

Such idiosyncrasies sometimes drive anti-crayfish gastronomes into the pages of other guides—though the estrangement rarely outlasts one edition. No other guide has the Michelin's scope and precision, and some employ inspectors who allow their judgment to be influenced by a restaurateur's willingness to feast them on the house or order several copies of the next edition. All Michelin inspectors pay cash and their bills are filed at HQ.

LEADER of the opposition is the *Guide Kléber-Colombes*, published by France's only manufacturer of tubeless tires (the subsidiary of an American firm). Unable to adopt a complex system of symbols without seeming to plagiarize the Michelin formula, it is reduced to wordiness; but it is trying hard to develop a distinctive approach and in a few years' time it could have Michelin worried. Its present sale is around forty thousand copies.

The *Guide des Routiers* was intended originally for long-distance truck drivers and commercial travelers. It lists inexpensive restaurants whose specialties are ample food, a free and easy atmosphere, and a pretty waitress who pretends not to

understand truck drivers' jokes. Unfortunately, most restaurants in the *Routiers* category seem to have installed television recently to attract football fans on Sunday afternoons, and the baleful box imposes itself at full blast most weekdays too: the *bonne franquette* is but a memory, there is neither joking nor flirting, and the food is turned to ashes by the puerile propaganda of the state broadcasting monopoly's *Journal télévisé*. In the guidebook I should like to edit one day there would be a tiny death's-head symbol meaning "Beware-TV."

The guide of the *Club des Sans-Club* used to be bought by many tourists for the reductions it entitled one to at certain restaurants. A Paris court decreed two years ago that this title be dropped, to avoid confusion with the *Club des Cent Kilos*, and the unfortunate *Sans-Club* found itself sans name, sans guide, sans everything. Its guide has reappeared as the *Guide des Auberges de France*, a gossip sort of guide with culinary standards roughly midway between those of the *Routiers* and *Kléber-Colombes*. It sells about thirty thousand copies.

MICHELIN's only perceptible reaction to this competition is to pay increasing attention to the opinions and recommendations of their readers. In 1958 the editors received fifteen thousand letters: a dozen or so from would-be inspectors, a dozen from lunatics and jokers, the remainder submitting tens of thousands of detailed reports on hotels and restaurants. Surprisingly, British and American tourists—possibly because they are more accustomed than the French to writing letters to the editor—contributed a sixth of these. Although they paid more attention than French correspondents to questions relating to comfort and sanitation, they also displayed a knowledgeable interest in cookery and wines.

All such letters are carefully analyzed and taken into consideration, one is informed, when the next edition of the Guide is being prepared. But the seven anonymous inspectors rightly have the last word. These are precincts from which the beery breath of democracy must inevitably be excluded.

DANCE

The Bolshoi's Splendid Isolation

FRED GRUNFELD

WHEN PRINCESS AURORA pricked her finger on a spindle, she and her entire court fell asleep for a hundred years. At long last an intrepid prince fought his way through the brambles and implanted the kiss that awoke Aurora and her people. The wedding followed in due course, but history does not record the prince's reaction to finding himself suddenly confronted by a courtful of in-laws whose ideas on dress and table manners belonged to an earlier century.

In many matters of style the Bolshoi Ballet resembles its classic heroine, the Sleeping Beauty. Since the end of the last century it has slumbered in magnificent isolation while the rest of the ballet world,

wardness may sometimes be a blessing in disguise.

Even in its new and revised productions the Bolshoi today remains the principal custodian of certain solid, old-fashioned virtues that have largely disappeared elsewhere. The current version of "Swan Lake" is a case in point. Contrary to what one might expect, it does not adhere to the familiar choreography of Ivanov and Petipa. Most of the miming has gone by the board, in spite of the fact that Russian dancers are superb mimes. A melodramatic happy ending replaces the tragic denouement of the original. ("We do not like to have evil triumph over good," explained the director-general, Georgi Orvid, in answer to my question about the change.) Thus trimmed and simplified—not to say streamlined—"Swan Lake" provides an ample frame for displays of breath-taking solo virtuosity and ensemble maneuvers. Every element falls naturally into place as the ballet unfolds and the evil wizard gets his comeuppance; any ten-year-old can follow the story line, even without the aid of a synopsis. The most impressive aspect of this production is its air of classic restraint and supreme discipline. The soloists never allow themselves the luxury of turning their big moments into circus acrobatics. Technique, the sore thumb of so much English and American ballet, rarely sticks out and obscures the view. It almost goes without saying that no company ever seen in New York has had so many first-rate dancers with which to fill every role, and that the Bolshoi ballet school—where students exercise for years before being allowed to wear toe shoes—graduates a peerless *corps de ballet*.

If the sets look dun-colored and the lighting rudimentary, such shortcomings only heighten the atmosphere of romantic period pieces like "Swan Lake." The Bolshoi's somno-



furiously spinning on its axis, has developed a whole new set of dance values. In France the Diaghilev era came and went, but echoes from Paris and Monte Carlo never reached Moscow. Cubism and symbolism and constructivism and Freud made their appearance on western ballet stages; the Bolshoi dreamed on as before, in dreams that told stories.

The awakening kiss has not yet been administered to the Bolshoi (for "prince" in this balletic parable, I hope you haven't read "S. Hurok"). Meanwhile the company carries on with its Victorian traditions—and the disconcerting thing is that it probably hasn't missed very much during its years of withdrawal. A little back-