

Monsieur le Chef

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MONSIEUR LE CHEF.

Who will dispute the fact that the position of a "Maitre Chef" in an Hotel, be it large or small, is a very important one. Many a reputation of such an establishment has suffered grievous harm through indifferent cooking, and many a Banquet or dinner party fell flat when the cuisine did not come up to expectations.

I remember the days, when after an official dinner, the Chef was called into the Banqueting room and congratulated by whosoever was in the Chair on his culinary achievements and the company "took wine" with him. I consider this a very pleasant custom which I hope will be kept up, for not even the most striking after dinner speech (and how many can be called thus) will make up for a meal which is unattractive.

Having attended a good many Banquets and Dinners given by various Swiss Societies at the Dorchester Hotel, at which praise was given for the excellent meals served, I decided to seek an interview with the Maitre Chef of this famous establishment, which was kindly granted to me.

I do not think I give any secret away if I mention that he is a compatriot of ours and that his name is Monsieur Eugene Kaufeler. He was born at Wittengen (Ct. Aargau) in 1908.

When finishing his schooling, young Eugene Kaufeler was apprenticed to the famous Baur-au-Lac, Zurich, winning an apprentice's prize at a Culinary Exhibition. In 1928, he obtained a position at the Eden-au-Lac, Zurich, and then went to the Kulm Hotel, St. Moritz. From the latter M. Kaufeler went on to the Beau-Rivage Palace, Lausanne, to the Buffet de la Gare, Zurich, and the Esplanade Hotel, Berlin, all world famous establishments.

In 1936 he came to London where he spent eight months at the Dorchester, before going to Norbury House, Droitwich, as Chef. In September 1939, he returned to the Dorchester. On the retirement of Monsieur Jean Virlogeux in 1950, M. Eugene Kaufeler succeeded to that coveted position — Maitre Chef des Cuisines of the Dorchester. Many years of hard and progressive work were thus suitably rewarded.

Holding this important office, M. Kaufeler has presided over the preparation of many wonderful menus set before famous people from all over the world.

* * *

I was cordially received by M. Kaufeler in his sanctuary, garbed in his Chef's attire. On enquiring about his daily routine work, he informed me that the first job in the morning consisted in making the menu.

Owing to the still cumbersome restrictions and import controls menus can nowadays only be made after the goods have been delivered; an important factor also to be taken into account are the number of people to be expected.

I was particularly interested to hear how menus can be submitted to organisers of banquets several months ahead. M. Kaufeler informed me, that the principal point when doing so was to take into consideration the time of season.

"The kitchen in a big London hotel", he said, "is run entirely on French lines and the French language is strictly adhered to." (Kitchen French).

The Staff at the Dorchester numbers about 700 of which 100 are employed in the kitchen. There the staff consists principally of British nationals, but there are also some Swiss, French and Italians. They are called the "Kitchen Brigade", which unit is divided up into sections, each section is under the command of its head, i.e. Sous Chefs, Saucier, Pâtissier, Garde-Manager, Entremeter, Potager, Poissonier, Rotisseur, Grilladin, Hors d'oeuvrier, Confiseur, Glacier, Tourier, each head having a staff of from 2-8 commis, and over all the Maitre Chef rules supreme.

All the meals served at the Dorchester are supplied from the same kitchen and are distributed to the Grill-room, Restaurant, eight floors, smaller banqueting rooms and of course, to the Ballroom which takes alone about 900 couverts. Should all the rooms be occupied about 2,000 meals would be served daily to the guests alone. The 700 staff have also to be fed three times a day.

M. Kaufeler was kind enough to show me over the spacious kitchens, which have the reputation of being completely up-to-date in equipment. Here I saw the main kitchen, larder, pastry kitchen, stillroom, vegetable room, food store, bakery, washing-up room (china), silver cleaning room, sculery, Chef's office etc.

There were various types of stoves — electric, gas, and steam, infra-red grills, electric fryers, hot cupboards and the following machines: Meat mincing machines, meat slicing machines, meat cutting machines,



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Very interesting was the view of the larder, where raw meat, fish and poultry were kept cool and ready to cook, the large refrigeration plant, and the food store.

There was a large tank with live blue trout and I was sorry that I did not bring along my fishing tackle. I could have watched for hours all the dishes being prepared and delicious cakes and patisserie made. There were large ovens where rolls and bread were baking too, but the time of a Maitre Chef is precious and thus my visit had to come to a close.

On departing from M. Kaufeler I asked him whether he finds cooking nowadays much more difficult than in former years. "Yes" he said, "cooking is now harder than in normal times but still very interesting as a profession. It is a gift and an art."

From all I saw, I am convinced that M. Kaufeler has that gift, and I wish him great success in his profession. By his skill he has given us much pleasure, and I look forward to the next Banquet, knowing that the menu will be another masterpiece of an excellent

Maitre Chef.

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