Simple Cooking

Electronic Edition

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Sichuan Cookery

Fuschia Dunlop

(Michael Joseph, £20, 276 pp.)

In 1994, Fuchsia Dunlop went to the provincial capital, Chengdu, to study at Sichuan University. But she already knew that her real interest was that area's cooking, a subject that might not have been taught where she was officially enrolled but certainly was at a nearby famous cooking school, the Sichuan Institute of Higher Cuisine. So, one sunny October afternoon, she and a college mate set out on bicycles to find it.

> **We could hear from the street that we had arrived. Fast, regular chopping, the sound of cleavers on wood. Upstairs, in a plain white room, dozens of apprentice cooks in white overalls were engrossed in learning the arts of sauces. Chillies and ginger were being pulverized with pairs of cleavers on tree-trunk chopping-boards, Sichuan peppercorns ground to a fine brown powder, and the students scurried around mixing oils and spices, fine-tuning the flavours of the rich dark liquids in their crucibles. The air hummed with a gentle rhythmic pounding, the sound of china spoons in china bowls. On long parallel tables sat bowls of ingredients; pools of soy sauce and oil, piles of sugar and salt. Notebooks scribbled with Chinese characters lay around on the tables amid the blood-red chillies and scattered peppercorns. The light streamed in through open windows. We decided immediately that this was where we had to study.**

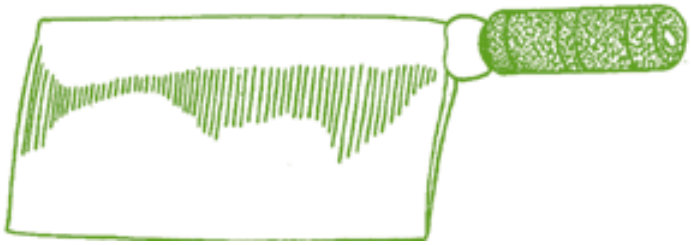
They both began taking private classes there with the assistance of the school's English tutor, who helped them decipher the Sichuan dialect and explained unfamiliar culinary terms. Dunlop did so well that she impressed her teacher, a legendary chef named Gan Guojian and, to her surprise, was invited to become a regular student, something that had never before been offered to a foreigner. "Naturally," she writes, "I leapt at the opportunity, enrolled and paid my modest fees, and was promptly issued with my own chef's overalls and Chinese cleaver." And never looked back.

The author's curiosity about Sichuan cooking was not in the least limited to what she was being taught at the academy, however. She charmed her way into the kitchens of several of the city's restaurants, including that of the traditional snack specialist Long Chao Shou, and spent

her free time (amazing that she had any) wandering the bustling streets and alleyways.

> **Exploring Chengdu was a never-ending pleasure. I recall sitting with an old roast-duck vendor in a narrow backstreet which meandered among the wooden courtyard houses in the centre of town, discussing the food of the past and watching the life of the teeming city flow by. Fruit vendors passed, bearing bamboo baskets laden with cherries or "dragon-eye" fruit dangling from either end of their bamboo shoulderpoles. A sharp metal clink heralded the arrival of the knife-sharpener, bearing two cleaver blades and a pair of round-handled Chinese scissors.**

What she has made of this experience can be found in SICHUAN COOKERY, which is the sort of eye-opening, groundbreaking, reporting-from-the-source kind of cookbook that until previously has been restricted to the provincial cooking of Italy and France. Now, out of the blue, we have a seminal exploration of one of China's great regional cuisines, written with intelligence, sympathy, and impressive attention to the smallest details. In short, it's been years since a cookbook has excited me as much as this one.



shi zai zhong guo
wei zai si chuan

China is the place for food
But Sichuan is the place for flavor
—traditional Chinese saying

THE PROVINCE OF SICHUAN is located in the center of China, with Yunnan to the south and Xizang Zizhiqu (or, as some of us think it should still be, Tibet) to the west. It is ringed with mountains and, until the introduction of air travel, could be reached only by following the torturously snaking and gorge-filled path of the Yangtze river. The poet Li Bai described it as harder to get to than heaven itself. Curiously, while this isolation allowed it to develop a culture and a cooking style very much its own, it also drew refugees seeking sanctuary during China's many troubled times, thus regularly introducing dishes and foodstuffs that would otherwise have been unknown there. These would subsequently enhance an already famous and complex cuisine.

Most famous among the arrivals, of course, was chile pepper, which first arrived in China in the late Ming period (16th century), when it was known as *fan jiao,* or barbarian pepper. As the rest of the world was also then discovering, chile is an ideal addition to the cooking of hot and humid places, and Sichuan is so much so that it is said that dogs there bark at the sun, it is so rarely seen.

Absence of sunshine aside, fertile soil, hot weather, and an abundance of rain and river water make Sichuan one of China's most fertile agricultural areas. A wide range of fruits and vegetables are grown there in abundance, tea plants thrive on the misty mountainsides, and, until the advent of rampant pollution, fish flourished in the many rivers and streams. And this is only a partial list. As the author notes, "To the eyes of Chinese gourmets, the entire Sichuan region, with its mountains, forests, rivers, and plains, is one extraordinary larder filled with the stuff of gastronomic dreams."

The marriage of this abundance with the natural Chinese interest in culinary matters produced an extremely sophisticated cuisine. Sichuanese chefs are famous for their skills—cutting methods, control of heat, and elaborately worked-out seasoning techniques. They have different culinary terms for every way of slicing up food, carefully catalogued subtle gradations of taste, and names for twenty-three complex flavors (each—strange flavor, hot-and-numbing flavor, red-oil flavor, salt-savory flavor, etc.—explained in detail in an appendix).

Because of all this, a Sichuan banquet can be an overwhelming experience, an endless display of exotic flavor blendings and virtuoso cooking skills, often employing the rare and expensive ingredients called *shan zhen hai wei*—"treasures from the mountains and the seas." Such banquets are a major component of the regional cuisine, and Dunlop writes about them evocatively and well.

Fortunately, she is just as—if not even more—interested in the two other basic traditional categories, vernacular cooking and street food, and just as willing to seek out cooks notably adept at preparing them. Take Sichuanese roast duck, which, like Peking roast duck, evolved from techniques used to roast suckling pigs for the Emperor. Both are prepared in much the same manner, but the Sichuanese version is chopped up on the bone and served in a deep bowl in a thick broth made from pork bones and the duck's roasting juices. Mr. Liu, who sells it from a tiny stall which is usually mobbed with customers, talked her through the making of the dish during a lull in business. Mr. Liu, as it turned out, was much freer with his recipe than Mr. Xie, a noodle shop proprietor, who was not especially interested in revealing his recipe for his locally acclaimed

version of dan dan noodles. To get it required frequent visits and constant cajoling.

Of course, not all the recipes come with such tales; the point is that they reveal, again and again, her determination to find out what ingredients and techniques bring out the best in each dish. Because of this, all the recipes *are* prefaced with valuable explanatory material that usually details the provenance of the dish, locates its place in the larger context of the cuisine, and provides helpful cooking notes that often include local variations, as here with fish soup with pickled greens:

> **The ginger, garlic, and chilli give the soup a peppery zing, but local people often enhance this by adding a final scattering of spices and hot oil, which can make the soup so hot it will blow your head off.**

Finally, I should point out that, while Sichuan cuisine is flavor-intensive, it is not, for the most part, particularly complicated or demanding of special (or long lists of) ingredients. If you are at all engaged in Chinese cooking, your kitchen cabinet already possesses many of the things she calls for: hot bean paste, Sichuan peppercorns, black Chinese vinegar, dark soy sauce, etc.—although you may have to make an effort to locate the Sichuanese preserved vegetables that are used in several dishes and work up some nerve to make your own fermented glutinous rice wine.

The bottom line for me with any cookbook is not that it contains recipes that are worth trying but recipes that I am already certain I shall. SICHUAN COOKERY passes this test with flying colors, because there are many dishes here that I am panting to make and Dunlop's carefully detailed instructions make me confident of success. Among them are the Sichuanese version of sweet-and-sour pork, dressed in a dark, tangy sauce, utterly unlike any version I have encountered before; her take on "second-sister rabbit cubes," chunks of rabbit with peanuts in hot bean sauce, a dish that has been celebrated in local verse; and "pockmarked Mother Chen's beancurd," a famous preparation that "epitomizes Sichuan's culinary culture, with its fiery peasant cooking and bustling private restaurants" but is rarely made correctly in Chinese eateries abroad. I encourage you to go and do likewise. ❖

SICHUAN COOKERY is currently available only through British and Canadian booksellers. However, W. W. Norton will be publishing the book in the United States early next year under the title LAND OF PLENTY: A TREASURY OF AUTHENTIC SICHUAN COOKING—worth waiting for, especially if you prefer not dealing with British weights and measures.

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masters of smoke

Say "real barbecue" and the first thought that used to come to my mind was the Deep South, pure and simple. But two fine new books on the subject have greatly expanded my horizon, not to mention my barbecue map. **The Grand Barbecue**, by Doug Worgul (Kansas City Star Books, $34.95, 128 pp.), is the one that first catches your eye, a large-format hardcover devoted to the history, places, personalities, and techniques of Kansas City barbecue. To some extent, this city's claim to being the nation's barbecue capital is a fluke. If Calvin Trillin had been raised in Chicago or Memphis, two other great barbecue centers, personalities like Arthur Bryant and Ollie Gates would have remained local legends and Kansas City might be best known nationally for a certain muddy-tasting, corn-syrup-laden table sauce.

Even so, real barbecue has long made itself at home in Kansas City, and Doug Worgul has delved deep into the fascinating story of how this came to be (illustrated with some great photographs of pitmasters at work and a priceless sequence of an order being whipped together at Arthur Bryant's). Especially rewarding are the tales of the early pitmen who set the style and gave the city its taste for smoked meat—Henry Perry, "Poppa" Miller, and Arthur Pinkard; the period newspaper reviews of memorable joints; and the many behind-the-scene glimpses into what is an extremely demanding and not especially profitable profession.

Visitors will find this a trustworthy guide to KC's best barbecue joints; home pitmasters will garner advice and recipes; and wannabe competitors will learn quite a bit about the American Royal Barbecue, the World Series of barbecuing. The prose flows by so easily that you might not notice that it has its serious—at times almost mystical—side. But by the time you read the afterword, you'll realize that the waters you've been skimming lightly over run deeper in Kansas City than you might think.

In **Robb Walsh's Legends of Texas Barbecue Cookbook** (Chronicle, $18.95, 269 pp.), that depth is more immediately apparent, not least because of the volume's grittier design. It's the sort of book that *wants* to get sauce stains on it, with duotone photographs that capture the louche side of the barbecue life (as well as fill any need you have to see beefy white guys in Stetson hats). As the title says, this is a cookbook, and a terrific one at that, but it also offers

a chapter-by-chapter sociohistorical survey of Texans and smoked meat, which, it turns out, is no simple thing. As Walsh says, when you say "Texas barbecue," do you mean "East Texas pork ribs slow-smoked over pecan? Elgin hot guts? Cowboy beef brisket cooked over mesquite? Brownsville *barbacoa* [cow head*]?" In this state, if you don't like the barbecue, just drive a hundred miles in any direction and get served something different.

Fortunately, Walsh knows the lay of the land and, more importantly, the reigning pitmasters. You'll meet a lot of them in this book, sharing recipes and a wealth of tips. You'll learn how to slice a brisket, barbecue a goat, smoke-grill a $2^{1}/_{2}$-pound sirloin, and prepare Buster's H-Bomb, a garlic-and-jalapeño-stuffed smoked boneless pork shoulder. Naturally, there are also meat rubs, mops, and sauces galore.

I particularly admire **Legends of Texas Barbecue Cookbook** for its honesty: if Texans have a coherent barbecue ethos, it's pretty much based on the preferences and prejudices of white men. In the Lone Star State, "barbecue" can just as easily mean smokehouse meat or cowboy campfire grilling as it does cheap cuts of meat cooked to tender perfection over slow smoke. Walsh points out that white Texans prefer to trace barbecue back to European immigrants and their smokehouses, even though blacks were barbecuing in Texas before they ever came along.

I'm sure the smoke-cooked prime rib sold at Smitty's Meat Market in Lockhart is pretty damned delicious. But in my dreams, I'll be hanging out at Miller's Bar-B-Q, a black San Antonio joint that operated in an obscure suburban backyard for fifty years, unadvertised and unlisted in the Yellow Pages. Health inspectors refused to issue citations despite countless violations because the place was just too good to close down. Myrtle Miller Johnson died in 1999, at the age of ninety-six, and ordered Miller's burned down upon her death so that inferior product could never be sold there. Now *that's* barbecue. ◆

*He tells you how to do this at home, too, and it's surprisingly easy. First, get your cow's head. Then, skin it, lop of the ears, rinse it out with a hose, and cut out the tongue (reserved to make chopped tongue tacos—recipe also included). Then it's just a matter of seasoning the head and getting it to fit into your 18-quart electric roaster oven....

short-listed

SOUTHERN BELLY:
THE ULTIMATE FOOD LOVER'S COMPANION TO THE SOUTH

John T. Edge

(HILL STREET, $24.95, 270 PP.).

ALTHOUGH THE PHRASE MIGHT LEND ITSELF TO MISREADING, I mean nothing but respect (and refer to nothing but culinary matters) when I call John T. Edge "The Mouth of the South." There are reasons beyond this book say this, but—so far as supporting evidence is required—it will certainly do. In these pages you will not only be taken to the most interesting and plainly best Southern eateries, no matter how lowly or obscurely located, but you will learn pretty much all there is to know about them and what they serve in a prose that goes down as easily as aged bourbon mixed with branch water and, for me at least, is just about as intoxicating.

One reason for this is that, although a literate man who can compare Harlan Sanders to Tolstoy (and not to the Colonel's disadvantage), with a thorough grounding in the history of the South in general and Southern cooking in particular, he never lets this interfere when he cuts to the chase. "I can spot a plate of processed turnip greens at twenty paces. Ragged, leathery leaves reduced to a mulch worthy only of cattle fodder," begins his account of Bully's Soul Food, an eatery in Jackson, Mississippi.

He goes on to observe that Ballery Bully serves no such thing, only superbly fresh greens, often in profuse assortment—"golden-hued shards of cabbage studded with pork fat; dusky collards stewed with a few strips of sweet onion; a messy mélange of peppery mustard greens and sharp turnips." You measure a man's passion for the dishes of his childhood by his rage at their mistreatment, for it is this that provides emotional depth to his joy at finding them done right.

As that passage on greens also illustrates, another measure is a taste for food so humble that locals themselves have a hard time coming by it. Visiting Shealy's Bar-B-Que in Leesville, South Carolina, he skips the ribs ("cooked on one of those infernal gas cookers") and goes straight to the liver nips, "dumplings made from beef liver, sage, and flour, boiled in beef stock" and the

potmeat (explained to him by a waiter as being "similar to hash but not chopped up so much. With potmeat you can still pick out pieces of ear, tongue, that sort of thing").

Unlike many another writer of eating guides, John T. (as he calls himself) knows that the flavor of the food is part and parcel with the flavor of the people who cook it, and he's equally alert to both. SOUTHERN BELLY has a cast of characters such that you leave it wondering if Carson McCullers or Flannery O'Connor actually wrote fiction. There's Addie Williams, at Macy's Lunch Counter in Atlanta, Georgia, who puts a grade for your eating habits on the bill, and Eva Perry, who sells a stunning assortment of snack food from a stand on Oak Street in New Orleans: ice snowballs drenched with flavors like Creole cream cheese and wedding cake; "tiny tins filled with pecan pie, sweet potato pie, and sweet potato-pecan pie; and dirty blonde pralines, thick with pecans." Eva, a sweet and happy soul likely to break into a chorus of Little Richard's "Tutti-Frutti" when asked what flavors of snow cone she sells, explains herself so:

> **I'm a river lady. I was born on Glendale Plantation in St. Charles Parish. My grandmother taught me how to cook and taught me how to act. I was raised to say yes ma'am and no ma'am, to give everybody you met a smile. Even a dog should get a smile, a little "Hi puppy, how do you do."**

Another rarity is that John T. is not afraid to write about Southern eateries that have come and gone. (There are also quite a few that came and *almost* went but for the grace of God didn't, like Taylor Grocery and Restaurant, in Taylor, Mississippi, a legendary fried catfish place—he makes you heave a sigh of relief about its last-minute rescue by new owners committed to keeping the original flame lit.) Some of the vanished ones are famous (or infamous, like Lester Maddox's Pickrick), but many are unsung, like the pool hall where the author used to eat scrambled dogs as boy. (This is a hot dog covered with chili, topped with onions and—the defining touch—a handful of Oysterette crackers.) There's so much South in these pages that by the time you finish SOUTHERN BELLY you'll feel like you were born there.

One of the problems with reviewing a book like this is that you want to quote everything, so you never get to the point. Or maybe the point *is* the quotations. As Roy Blount, Jr., says of the book, "I want to keep it around for reference and rereading. That's why I keep fighting off the urge to eat it."

THE AMERICAN ETHNIC COOKBOOK FOR STUDENTS

Mark H. Zanger

(Oryx Press, $34.95, 325 pp.)

Truth in reviewing: Mark is a friend of mine. However, as he would be the first to tell you, I didn't immediately warm to his book, although not for any reason to do with him. This is a reference book designed to allow teachers to—for example—assign students to select recipes representative of their own ethnic heritage (or of one that interests them) and then prepare a meal with these and write a report about the experience. I have an almost visceral dislike of this idea, partly because I am made up of a complex mix of warring ethnic factions—Irish, English, German, Italian, American Indian—and wax sentimental about none of them. Also, to tell the truth, as a student I hated home projects. Homework was bad enough. But dragging the whole family into some social studies project? Dangerous idea.

Having got that off my chest, I can honestly report that, for the non-student at least, this is an enormously instructive and emotionally gripping book, devoted to the cooking and foodways of 122 different ethnic groups that have made their way to this country.* That number is staggering, and the table of contents fills two pages of double columns. It lists not only Germans but Germans from Russia and the Pennsylvania Dutch; includes every Native American tribe from the Apache to the Zuni; and goes out of its way to embrace groups whom history has rendered stateless—like the Hmong and the Wends—or whose origins are simply mysterious—like the Melungeons and the Gypsies. Each chapter begins with a brief but sensitively crafted introduction, followed by a small collection of representative recipes, chosen not only for their authenticity but for their accessibility to those who may never before have cooked an ethnic dish.

Having myself seen Mark's cookbook collection, I know he has an eye for the undiscovered gem, but the effort he has put into researching recipes for this book simply boggles the mind. Who would ever know, unless you actually went through the cookbook page by page, that you would find a recipe for *kelaguen*, a chicken salad from Guam, in Give Us This Day: Recipes from Reseda II Ward Relief Society (published in 1978 in Chatsworth Stake, California), or one for

*A hundred and twenty-three if you are willing to count Mormons as an ethnic category, which I am not. Furthermore, in an unaccountable lapse, he fails to include a recipe for lime Jell-O, the delicacy most usually associated with this sect.

sheera, an Asian-Indian confection made of farina and flavored with cardamom, in GREEN MOUNTAIN FAVORITES (a fund raiser for the Northern Vermont Chapter of the Red Cross).

Equally impressive is that a surprising number of these recipes demand to be made. This required not only a lot of recipe testing but a uniquely open-hearted palate. Few food writers (including myself) would have touched this project with a ten-foot pole, and none that I know would have acquitted themselves nearly as well. There are dishes here well worth making that you most likely have never heard of, let alone seen a recipe for: the Hmong recipe for watercress and beef (which appears, naturally, in THE MINNESOTA ETHNIC FOOD BOOK), Guanafuna Rice and Beans, and—from the Italian-American shrimp-fishing community in Amelia Island, Florida—Nonnie's shrimpballs and spaghetti. And, finally, for us mixed-up multicultural types, I have to mention three wonderfully inclusive appendices: "They All Stuffed Cabbage," "They All Fried Bean Cakes," and "They All Fried Dough." Amen, brother, amen. [Note: Additional material and recipes can be found at WWW.ETHNICOOK.COM.]

TANDOOR: THE GREAT INDIAN BARBEQUE

Ranjit Rai

(OVERLOOK PRESS, $40, 262 PP.)

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER EATEN IN AN INDIAN RESTAURANT, the traditional tandoor is a large, thick-walled, vase-shaped clay pot, not unlike those in which Ali-Baba's forty thieves hid themselves (although smaller models would only conceal a skinny child). After it has been properly tempered, a fire is built up inside it and allowed to burn down to charcoal, and food is cooked in it, either by being slapped onto the inside walls (flatbreads) or placed on long skewers, the points of which are inserted into the coals and the top ends left resting against the walls. Because the clay absorbs the heat of the fire and radiates it back within a narrow circumference, the tandoor is the perfect shape for preparing skewered food, cooking it through before the meat has a chance to dry out.

TANDOOR, written by a native of India and originally published in that country, is a thorough and absorbing account of that oven's history, construction, and use, followed by a huge selection

of recipes for authentic tandoori dishes, including all the basic preparations, marinades, side dishes, and a lovely assortment of flatbreads. Moreover—and this is by no means meant to denigrate the prose—anyone interested in Indian cooking in general and in the tandoor in particular, will find that the color photographs alone justify purchasing this book. These range from a fascinating sequence detailing the construction of a traditional clay tandoor to pictures of Indian life as it revolves around it, whether in restaurants, shops, or at home, in India as well as such nearby countries as Pakistan and Afghanistan. In particular, regional flatbreads of every sort are made in it, and there are many shots of local bakers going about their business, patting out and baking *roti* and *nan*.

However, of equal interest—at least to the cook—are the pictures of the dishes themselves, most showing how they should look when properly made, but not a few detailing technique—such as lamb shoulder being flattened, marinated, stuffed, and finally rolled and tied. There are also photos of different sorts of skewers, including a pair especially designed for bread baking. This procedure also requires a flat, round pillow, on which the dough is laid before being slapped on the inside wall, holding the dough flat so that the entire surface adheres and also preventing the baker from being burnt. One of the skewers has a spatula at one end; the other, a hook. The bread is freed with the spatula and lifted out on the hook—details that make a procedure that has always appeared fraught with risk suddenly seem doable.

If the book is to be faulted in any way, it is the lack of detailed practical instructions for operating a tandoor: how much charcoal to use, how to fire it up, how to know when it is ready for cooking. There are hints about this, to be sure, but it's surprising that so little is spelled out, given how much detail is lavished on everything else.

However, the *real* problem with the book is far simpler and far more pervasive: how are we to lay hands on a tandoor in the first place? Diligent searching has not yet revealed a source of the simple domestic sort for sale in the USA (I did find instructions at one web site for making your own——good luck!).

Still, it will not be everyone who will want one. After all, it takes a bit of experience to master (especially if, as is often the case in India, it is insulated by being buried almost up to its lip in the backyard, and the cook must do all the cooking while squatting down next to it). Given this, the good news is, as Rangit Rai points out, that what makes tandoori dishes so delicious is not simply the cooking method but the complex marinades with which they are coated and the sauces with which they are served. Also, the wraparound radiant heat can be

somewhat replicated by using a large clay cooking pot in an ordinary oven.

In fact, reading this book reminded me that I have packed away for lack of use a very large, tandoor-shaped Superstone bean pot, so I am closer than I ever imagined to turning out skewers of *malai* chicken *tikka* (chicken pieces flavored with raw pineapple paste, green cardamom, ginger, and green chile) or *sidhi sadhi seekh* (kebabs made of ground lamb flavored with raw papaya, ginger paste, turmeric, and red chile powder). Hmm. Now, where does one get those two-foot-long metal skewers?

TRIFLE

Helen Saberi and Alan Davidson

(Prospect Books, $21/$16.50paper, 134 pp.)

These days, single-subject cookbooks are more often cloned than written—take two dozen recipes, add a delectable full-page photo of each, slap everything together and on to the next subject. The trifle—and here I mean that traditional English dessert consisting of several layers, starting with sponge cake of some sort soaked in sherry or white wine, successively topped with fresh fruit or jam, lots of rich egg custard, and, finally, whipped cream, plus some decorative edibles sprinkled on top—could easily be treated this way; properly made, it is the epitome of visual lusciousness.

Prospect Books, however, is not that sort of publisher, and what we have here instead is something more like a single-subject-dessert Tom Jones: the picaresque adventures of a lusty innocent who seeks his fortune in 18th-century London, where he encounters such odd fellows as Syllabub, Whim Wham, and Tipsy Cake. There, he mellows into eminent respectability without ever becoming stiff or dry and eventually fathers offspring who stake their claim in every imaginable culture and clime. Indeed, perhaps only McDonald's has a wider geographical range. Trifles are made and eaten from Iceland to the Horn of Africa, Trinidad to Australia—the only exceptions being dairy-challenged countries like China.

However, there is a scandalous twist to this story concerning an illegitimate offspring

that TRIFLE is too discreet to discuss (or, for that matter, barely reveal). In the early 19th century, a British chemist named Alfred Bird invented a custard simulacrum for his wife, who was allergic to eggs. It was made entirely of cornstarch (cornflour in British) and flavorings, a forerunner of today's boxed pudding mix. Bird's Custard Powder was marketed nationally in 1844, and it received an immediate welcome. Real custard can be tricky stuff; Bird's was all but foolproof. Real custard is made with eggs and cream; Bird's was cheaper.

For a fastidious palate, there is no comparison, but for many in England, then as now, the palate serves only as doormat to the gullet. Today, one in every three British households has Bird's in the cupboard, and it is near the top of the list of foods Brit expatriates wax nostalgic about. And any American interest in trifles usually comes about through the discovery of this exotic, enchanting stuff in the fancy grocery aisle. You can use vanilla pudding mix if you have to, Internet bulletin boards advise us, but it won't be nearly as good.

Ironically, if it weren't for Bird's Custard Powder, trifles might be almost as rare in Britain as they have become over here—something you would never know from reading this book. I could find Bird's name mentioned but twice, the first, disparagingly, in a quotation from Elizabeth David; the second, a brief mention in the book's glossary. In other words, TRIFLES, to return to our Henry Fielding analogy, is a *sentimental* work, portraying the world not as it is but as sensibility wishes it might be. In it, the reader is taken from cookbook to cookbook, recipe to recipe, through the centuries and about the planet, and everywhere trifles are made with real custard, and all is right with the world.

We are all, of course, sentimentalists of this sort when the occasion demands it, and lovers of egg custard will find the trifle—and its ancillary relations—about as good a way of eating it as has ever been devised. As it does with eggnog and bread pudding, the splash of liquor gives the creamy richness a burred edge; the fruit, fresh or pres-erved, adds a tangy sweetness. Each layer offers a different sort of softness to play against the others: moist and crumbly, thick and rich, dense and fruity, soft and airy—in other words, a polyphony of little nothings, of trifling raised to a higher power. Who could not love it?

Certainly, the simple goodness of the basic construct has allowed cooks over the centuries to fearlessly improvise, and the best of their efforts are presented here, often in their original words. Some versions are likely to attract only fanatics, but many others will bring joy to any table—for example, Countess trifle, Jane Grigson's banana trifle, Ommuntriffi (an Icelandic rhubarb trifle), and summer syllabub trifle.

TRIFLE can be ordered from Prospect Book's agent in the United States Johan Mathieson at Food Words, Box 42568, Portland OR 97242-0568 • (503) 232-3470 • FOODWORD@SPIRITONE.COM. Shipping is $4.50 for one book, $1.50 for each additional copy.

A MONTH OF SUNDAES

Michael Turback

(RED ROCK PRESS, $19.95, 181 PP.)

I had my first sundae at Beck's Pharmacy on the corner of Beale Street and North Central Avenue in Wollaston, Massachusetts, back in the late 1940s. Mr. Beck had full fountain service, and I was addicted to an ice-cream soda of my own devising, strawberry syrup mixed with seltzer and topped with a dollop of vanilla ice cream. Sundaes were usually beyond the reach of my pocket change, but occasionally my grandfather would treat me to one. It's hard to describe the impact such lavish opulence had on a child at a time when austerity was so much the rule that it was simply taken for granted, like summer heat waves before air conditioning. The only culinary experience that equalled it for years was my birthday cake, which, once the family had each had a serving, was mine to consume, a slice a day, until nothing was left but some ribs of frosting to scrape with my fingers from the serving plate.

It's been decades since I've eaten a sundae, or even thought of one, but Michael Turback's affable but informative history of that confection brought it all back in a rush. A former restaurateur himself, he is fascinated by the ingenious ways that entrepreneurs took a good idea and spun it, first, into ice-cream showcases—Howard Johnson's, Blum's, Schrafft's—then, into drive-in quick-serve stops—Carvel's, Dairy Queen—and, finally, into nostalgia—Junior's in Brooklyn, Tom's Ice Cream Bowl in Zanesville, Ohio, the Crown Candy Kitchen in St. Louis—where you are swept back to those innocent times when eating a bowl heaped with ice cream, syrup, and toppings galore was the phat, not the fat, life. In short: an entertaining blend of history, pop culture, and recipes for every sundae that ever there was, some welcome rediscoveries, some (like the fried-egg sundae) better left in their graves.

SECRETS OF SAFFRON

Pat Willard

(Beacon Press, $23, 225 pp.)

Samuel Hartlib, an English Puritan and friend of the poet Milton, argued that farmworkers should be allowed to gather saffron if it bloomed on Sunday since it was God who made it flower then and He would not want "a thing so usefull for men's health" to be lost by failure to harvest it. This short statement says a lot about saffron, some that you may already know and some that you may not. It is precious; it is potent; it has a powerful effect on otherwise rigorously sober minds. It is also rare, in part because when the crocus that produces it finally blossoms, the flowers must be gathered by hand early in the morning, before the heat of the sun causes them to wilt.

To put it another way, the power that saffron has always had over the human imagination is as volatile, as charged with intensity, and as fleetingly mortal as life itself. It is also as labor-intensive. Once the blossoms have been gathered, the fragile stigmas must be carefully plucked out: "stupifyingly tedious work," Willard calls it. The flower petals are discarded—"drifting like purple snow across doorsteps and alleys and clogging the gutters"—while the tiny pile of stigmas accumulates ever so slowly. It takes at least seventy-five thousand blossoms to produce a pound of saffron, and that estimate is conservative.

This is why there is no such thing as cheap saffron, and why, despite the potential profit, growers are turning to easier work. Currently, in Spain, Willard reports, "the saffron fields are receding fast, tilled over into vineyards and olive groves, and a way of life—the rituals the flower demands—is disappearing along with it." Many would hardly notice if it vanished entirely. Brilliant orange, strongly perfumed, with a taste that is distinctly pungent, bitter, and medicinal but still hinting of honey, it seems more in a class with frankincense and myrrh than nutmeg and clove. The same clinging intensity that makes it so intoxicating to some cultures makes it suspicious to us, a Zsa Zsa Gabor in a field of Kate Winslets.

This may also be a matter of climate. Willard writes that it is one of nature's paradoxes that

the most lush and perfumed flowers grow in the driest, sunniest places. Perhaps it is not too much to believe that just as people who live in northern climes gravitate to diets packed with fat, those who abide in hot aridity crave a sensual voluptuousness to offset the bleached-out world in which they live.

In any case, the saffron crocus flourishes wild in Asia Minor and the Mediterranean, and it is there that all its qualities have been most appreciated, its culinary ones possibly last of all. Saffron's potency made it a natural component of religious offerings and medical concoctions (for which, in folk remedies, it is still used); the brilliant deep yellow of its pollen produced a widely treasured dye. "A herb of the sun, under the dominion of Leo," one of my herbals tells me, and quite appropriately, too. When Tom Stobart, in HERBS, SPICES, AND FLAVORINGS, calls it useless as a fabric dye because of its solubility in water, he is thinking of the British Isles, not sunny Mesopotamia or ancient Egypt, where it was used to color the linen bindings with which embalmers wrapped the dead.

All this is here in this quite fascinating book, and more besides, because by the end the author has not only attended the harvest in Spain but grown, picked, and dried a tiny crop herself. (She also shares her favorite recipes.) Like her subject, Willard's prose may not be to everyone's taste; it is romantic, impulsive, at times unabashedly intimate, at others encapsulating the history of civilizations so familiarly that you might think she had lived through it herself. A trifle unscholarly, perhaps, but that is just how it should be. For while the story of saffron may be as old as history and as complex as the designs of the Persian carpets for which it still serves as a dye, the experience of saffron is one of supersaturated intensity that, in the right circumstance, "pierceth to the heart." SECRETS OF SAFFRON can do the same.

takes on toques

FOR THE MOST PART, I have no time for cookbooks written by famous chefs—I don't cook that way; I don't even want to *eat* that way, unless someone else is paying. But in the last year I've come across two that I would have sorely regretted never having read: **BAY WOLF RESTAURANT COOKBOOK**, by Michael Wild (Ten Speed Press, $35, 239 pp.) and **STAFF MEALS FROM CHANTERELLE**, by David Waltuck and Melicia Phillips (Workman, $29.95, 448 pp.).

Of the two, the one I found most eye-opening was Wild's, because whereas Waltuck's is about what he serves his staff—hence the kind of food I'm more likely to be attracted to—Wild's book is about what he cooks for paying customers. Bay Wolf opened its doors in North Berkeley for lunch in 1975, a time when, as Wild puts it, "Chez Panisse had barely begun serving its $4.95 prix fixe meals." His resumé, had he been forced to submit one, would have stated as his qualifications an enthusiast's interest in cooking and a family background where Sunday's entertainment "was to drive out to San Fernando Valley and visit the chicken farms, buy fresh produce, and go to farmers' markets."

That, it turned out, although not without some alarming dips in the road, was enough. It might even have been the key. Rare is the culinary professional who is not at heart a cynic; survival almost requires it. Wild, however, seems to have retained his innocence; he remains, in the best sense of that word, an amateur. About the food at Bay Wolf, he writes: "There's *stuff* to it; even when it's completely delicate, it still has this internal power. Richness isn't the same as substance."

The result of such a culinary philosophy is a cooking where many of the dishes have been fined down so that a few good ingredients can speak out in full voice in preparations that are direct and unfussy. Roast salmon with beet vinaigrette is exactly that: ten ingredients counting salt and pepper. Duck liver flan with green peppercorns and marsala has nine. Counting the pastry itself as one, hazelnut, plum, and blackberry tart also has nine, including the whipped cream topping. Of course, this isn't universally true, but it is enough so to establish an immediate intimacy between the restaurant chef and the attentive home cook. In these pages, he seems to say, we're not so different, you and I, because we care about the same things. The result of this collaboration is food with which to wow yourself, then your guests.

STEPPING DIRECTLY OUT of the **BAY WOLF RESTAURANT COOKBOOK** and into **STAFF MEALS FROM CHANTERELLE** is a bit of a shock; this book is as noisy and bustling as the other is quietly contemplative. That isn't to say, however, that STAFF MEALS lacks charm or style. Both books are as impressive in design as they are in content. But they are also as different as are, well, New York City and Berkeley CA. Chanterelle opened its doors in 1979, only five years later than Bay Wolf. It too started with a modest menu, a waitstaff of only two, and Waltuck doing all the cooking. In a few weeks, though, the place was filled with reviewers, and Chanterelle quickly became a star in the Manhattan restaurant firmament.

One effect of that, of course, was an expansion of staff. Where once six sat around the table to eat before the restaurant opened, today there are twenty-five, often with the addition of friends and family members. As Waltuck points out, these days in the business full-staff dinners are more often an ideal than a reality. But they serve an important purpose, especially if they are as enjoyable as those at Chanterelle. When waitstaff and kitchen staff—often mutually hostile camps—eat and socialize together, traditional rivalries can be tempered by a feeling of family.

Naturally, the staff doesn't eat at the transcendental level that the patrons do, but they probably wouldn't want to, even if they could. What they are served instead is simultaneously simpler and more adventurous fare: Thai duck curry on one night, Moroccan lamb shanks on another, fish-and-chips (an occasional indulgence) on still another. Curiously, there is a strong Asian flavor here—it must be Waltuck's version of a busman's holiday. However, staff members take turns preparing the fare, so there's a fascinating range in the offerings, as well as one in the time and competency needed to prepare them. Happily, the book is chock full of kitchen tips, explanation of method, and recipes that make you want to pull it all together. ◆

Table Talk

☞**A Little About Our Own Doings.** Ten Speed Press has recently been releasing a series of culinary classics, freshly and handsomely designed, each with new prefatory material. These include Madeleine Kamman's WHEN FRENCH WOMEN COOK, with an introduction by Shirley Corriher; Bernard Clayton's THE BREADS OF FRANCE, with an introduction by Patricia Wells; and two books by Richard Olney, the original edition of THE FRENCH MENU COOKBOOK, with an introduction by Paul Bertolli, and LULU'S PROVENÇAL KITCHEN, with an introduction by me. This is a highly auspicious beginning to such a series, and I was honored to be asked to participate. ❖ Elsewhere, a review of Richard Schweid's CONSIDER THE EEL that had originally been destined to appear in this issue will be published instead in *The New York Times Book Review.*

☞**Worth a Visit: www.saffron.com** Most of us think of the best saffron as coming from Spain, but in fact that country is a minor-league player in saffron production, in part because production costs are so high there. Greece, Morocco, and Kashmir all produce more, but far and away the largest producer is Iran. This makes sense, since saffron is native there, and for the cooperatives that harvest it this has been a way of life for centuries. As you know, saffron is not cheap, especially when you learn that the long threads (styles) to which the tiny red stigmas are attached have no flavor or aroma and are left on solely to add to the product's weight. This site sells the highest quality Iranian stigmas, sans styles, at $35.95 an ounce, postpaid, which is a *fantastic* price for what you get. (Most dishes require less than half a gram, or 64 cents each.) They also sell the highest quality vanilla, but the saffron…wow!

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Sweet and Sour Red Peppers

From Sichuan Cookery, by Fuschia Dunlop

*Sweet peppers are also known in Chinese as lantern peppers (*deng long jiao*) because they look a bit like China's traditional festive red lanterns. In Sichuanese cookery, they are often stir-fried with pork or beef, but they also feature in a number of cold banquet dishes. The following mellow, gentle starter, which I enjoyed at the Shufeng restaurant in Chengdu, is easy to prepare. It needs to be served with one or two other dishes with contrasting tastes and textures—perhaps some smoked duck or other cold meat and a crisp green vegetable (olives might be a nice accompaniment too, although they're not Sichuanese). The same sauce can be used as a dressing for other cold vegetable dishes.*

[serves 4 as an appetizer with one or two other dishes]

2 red bell peppers • 3 teaspoons white sugar

3 teaspoons clear rice vinegar • salt to taste

2 teaspoons sesame oil

• Cut the peppers in half and remove the stems and seeds. Steam or boil for a few minutes until just cooked. Rinse in cold water, and then peel away the skins (this step can be omitted but gives a more sensuous result). Cut the pep-pers into strips and these put into a mixing bowl. Dissolve the sugar in the vinegar. Add 1 or 2 pinches of salt, to taste. Pour this sauce over the peppers and toss together. Then add the sesame oil and toss once again. Arrange prettily on a serving plate.

Roast Salmon with Beet Vinaigrette

From Bay Wolf Restaurant Cookbook, by Michael Wild

This dish is beautiful on the plate—the brilliant red beets, the pinkish orange salmon, the spritz of green parsley. A perfect accompaniment would be horseradish mashed potatoes, prepared by soaking grated horseradish in a little lemon juice and then stirring it into the finished potatoes just before serving.

[SERVES 4]

3 medium beets, cleaned of any surface dirt

1 shallot, minced

finely chopped zest and juice of 2 lemons

1 thyme sprig • 3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

4 portions salmon fillet, 5 ounces each

salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon finely minced Italian parsley

• Preheat the oven to 425°F. Place the beets in a baking pan with a little water, cover, and roast. They are done when their skins peel away easily. This will take 45 minutes for medium-sized beets, $1^1/_2$ hours for large beets. Cool, then peel and cut into tiny dice.

• Meanwhile, place the shallot in a small bowl with the finely chopped zest, juice, and thyme. Let macerate for 20 minutes, then whisk in the olive oil. Add the beets and season with salt and pepper. Let marry for 30 minutes.

• Preheat the oven to 450°F. Season the salmon with salt and pepper and sprinkle with the parsley. Arrange in a baking pan and set aside until just before the dish is to be served. Then roast the salmon for 8 minutes for medium-rare, a few minutes longer for medium. Serve immediately with the beet vinaigrette.

Sautéed Penne with Cauliflower and Chickpeas

From STAFF MEALS FROM CHANTERELLE, by David Waltuck & Melicia Phillips

This easy technique for making toasty-tasting sautéed pasta will open the door to endless creative possibilities. The results are always fast and flavorful. If you can, buy some merguez *or other lamb sausage to slice, sauté, and add to the other ingredients in the basic version of the recipe. If that doesn't suit you, perhaps adding sautéed red bell peppers, small cooked shrimp, and artichoke hearts will have appeal. The technique is adaptable on every level. You can tailor the recipe to suit yourself—varying the shape of the pasta, the vegetables, seasonings, type of meat or seafood—while using up odd ingredients lying around in the refrigerator.*

[SERVES 4]

Coarse (kosher) salt • 2 cups cauliflower florets

1 package (16 ounces) penne • 3 tablespoons olive oil

1 can (12 ounces) chickpeas, rinsed and drained

2 cloves garlic, minced • 1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

fresh lemon juice, to taste

• Bring a large stockpot of water and $^1/_4$ cup of salt [or less] to a boil over high heat. In a medium-size saucepan, bring $1^1/_2$ quarts water and 2 teaspoons of salt to a boil.

• When the water in the saucepan is boiling, add the cauliflower florets and blanch until just tender but still crunchy, about 3 minutes. Drain well and set aside.

• When the water in the stockpot is boiling, add the penne and cook, stirring frequently, until al dente, 8 to 10 minutes. Drain the penne and rinse briefly but thoroughly under cold running water. Drain again.

• Heat the oil in a large, deep, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add the cooked penne and sauté for 1 minute, tossing. Add the chickpeas and reserved cauliflower florets and sauté, tossing frequently, until the ingredients are lightly browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the garlic and pepper flakes and continue sautéing just until the garlic is fragrant, about 30 seconds; be careful not to let the garlic burn. Remove the skillet from the heat and season with salt and a good squeeze of lemon juice. Toss once more and serve immediately, directly from the skillet.

Adobo Chicken

From THE AMERICAN ETHNIC COOKBOOK FOR STUDENTS, by Mark Zanger

Adobo is the national dish of the Philippines. The Spanish word "adobo" means "marinade," but many Filipino-American recipes skip that step. This one, which does require marinating, was contributed by Mrs. Ken Pinckney (Maria Muribus) to THE ST. LOUIS COOKBOOK: BICENTENNIAL ISSUE, by the Women's Association of the St. Louis Symphony (1964). Mrs. Pinckney notes, "Adobo, made with chicken or pork, or both, was always served at the Filipino gatherings I attended as a child in San

Francisco." Adobo is the author's favorite way of preparing chicken, and our family has had it hundreds of times since my sister-in-law, Judith Music, learned it from a Filipina neighbor in 1978. You can multiply it, remove the skin from the chicken, and/or omit the browning of the chicken pieces.

[SERVES 4]

1/2 cup vinegar • 1 tablespoon soy sauce

2 teaspoons salt • 1/2 teaspoon whole black peppercorns

6 cloves garlic, chopped • 2 bay leaves, crumbled

2 celery stalks and leaves, chopped

2 1/2- to 3-pound cut-up frying chicken

about 3 tablespoons flour • 2 tablespoons peanut oil

serve with **boiled white rice**

• Add all the ingredients up to and including the chicken to a large pot, turning the chicken pieces over to coat them with the marinade. Let stand for 2 hours, turning the pieces occasionally.

• Cover the pot and bring its contents to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook until the chicken is barely tender, 30 to 40 minutes. Take the chicken from the pan, saving the marinade. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, coat each piece lightly with the flour.

• Heat the oil in a large frying pan and brown the chicken pieces on both sides, starting with the thighs and drumsticks. When all the chicken is browned, pour the marinade back over it. Cook over low heat, uncovered, until the sauce is reduced by half, about 40 minutes. Serve the chicken with its sauce over white rice.

Ray Lopez's Beef Ribs

From LEGENDS OF TEXAS BARBECUE, by Robb Walsh

Gonzales Food Market sells some of the best beef ribs in the state. I asked pit boss Ray Lopez what his secret was. He said, "I don't know, I just put them in a pan and smoke them for three or four hours." I didn't really understand the point of using a pan until I tried it. The grease

collects in the pan, and the ribs fry up crispy while they're smoking. It's a technique I plan to try on some other meats soon.

[SERVES 4]

2 to 3 pounds beef short ribs

3 tablespoons dry rub (see recipe below)

• Set up your smoker for indirect heat. Use wood chips, chunks, or logs, and keep up a good level of smoke. Maintain a temperature between 270°F and 325°F.

• Sprinkle the dry rub on the ribs and rub it in well. Put the short ribs in a glass or metal baking pan in the smoker, close to the heat source. Smoke for 3 hours, turning often to crisp all sides. Beef ribs are done when they are falling apart.

Billy Pfeffer's Dry Rub

[MAKES ABOUT 1/2 CUP]

3 tablespoons each **salt and good paprika**

1 tablespoon each **ground black pepper and cayenne**

• Combine all ingredients and store in a shaker bottle.

Bhutta Seekh Kabab

Adapted from TANDOOR: THE GREAT INDIAN BARBEQUE, by Ranjit Rai

*Corn (*bhutta*) is very popular in India. During peak season one can see* bhuttas *being roasted on makeshift* angeethis *at the corner of every street. Corn can be prepared in many ways. One novel way is the* bhutta seekh kabab. *Plan on two hours of preparation time; the cooking is quite quick.*

[SERVES 3 OR 4]

4 ears of corn, shucked • 5 medium yellow potatoes

3 or 4 scallions, minced (including the green)

1 serrano or similar hot green chile pepper,

seeded and minced

1 large onion, minced • 1/4 cup cornstarch

2 teaspoons peanut oil • 1 teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons melted butter for basting

FOR THE GARNISH

sliced lemon and mixed green relish (see recipe below)

• Take a sharp paring knife and slice through each row of kernels, directly down the center. Scrape the corn pulp into a bowl and discard the cobs. Meanwhile, boil the potatoes until tender. Let them cool and then peel and mash them (do not add any liquid). Mix the corn and the mashed potatoes with all the other ingredients, apart from the basting butter and, of course, the garnishes. The result should be a soft, pliable dough.

• Form this into sausage-shaped kababs about the thickness of a frankfurter but half the length. Skewer these on metal skewers and grill over hot coals until golden on all sides, turning them gently to keep them from falling off. Serve at once with the garnishes.

Mixed Green Relish

This simple and uncomplicated preparation is as full of flavor as the fresh spring air.

2 serrano or jalapeño peppers, cut in half, cored, and seeded

4 scallions, trimmed, but with the green ends left on

4 or 5 pickling or 2 regular cucumbers, peeled

a few mint leaves, chopped • 1 teaspoon black pepper

1/4 cup lemon juice • salt to taste

• Slice the chiles, scallions, and cucumbers into matchstick-size pieces. Immerse in cold water for 10 minutes, then drain and refrigerate for 10 minutes more. Toss with the other ingredients and serve.

Portuguese Pork with Saffron

From Secrets of Saffron, by Pat Willard

You can make this dish using a pork roast in much the same way as the sausage below; just cook the roast a little longer.

[serves 6]

A pinch (about 40 threads) of saffron

1/2 cup white wine

1 1/2 pounds Italian sausage, either hot or sweet, or a mixture of both

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 large garlic clove, minced

1 jalapeño pepper, sliced

juice of 1 lemon • 1/2 cup chicken stock

3 dozen littleneck clams, scrubbed clean

handful of fresh cilantro leaves, chopped

• Preheat oven to 4oo°F. Stir the saffron into the white wine and set aside to steep. Place the sausage in a shallow roasting pan and pour about a tablespoon of the oil over it. Place the pan in the oven and cook for about 30 to 40 minutes.

• Remove the sausage and cut into serving pieces. Set aside. In the same pan, on top of the stove, add the remaining oil and over medium heat, sauté the garlic and pepper until the garlic turns golden and the pepper skin begins to blister.

• Reduce the heat and add the saffron-infused wine (be careful—the oil may splatter). Stir, scraping up any meat or garlic pieces that might have stuck to the pan. Add the lemon juice, chicken stock, the reserved sausage pieces, and the clams. Raise the heat to medium high, cover the pan, and let simmer until all the clams open.

• Just before serving, stir in the cilantro. Serve over rice.

'Cue Heads

Adapted from The Grand Barbecue, by Doug Worgul

[serves a lot of people]

3 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, softened

2 bunches (about 12 to 16) scallions, minced

3 or 4 garlic cloves, minced

2 sticks butter, softened

salt and pepper to taste

2 heads cabbage, cut in half and cored

• Combine all the ingredients except the cabbage in a large mixing bowl and blend well. Really shove it in there between the leaves so that when the cabbages cooks in the grill they will be coated with it. Wrap each half head with heavy aluminum foil and cook over indirect heat in a barbecue grill or a meat smoker until a skewer indicates that the cabbage leaves are completely tender. If the outside leaves blacken during cooking, simply remove and discard them. Cut each half head into three or more sections for serving.

Bee's Knees Sundae

from A Month of Sundaes, by Michael Turback

Hollywood flapper Mabel Normand was a sundae inspiration. Not only did the silent film comedienne dress in the loose, saucy, short dresses that signified freedom, she flaunted her independence in all aspects of style. When she confessed that she poured honey over ice cream every day for breakfast, soda jerks responded with a loving tribute. (The recipe is from Stevens Ice Cream, Los Angeles CA.)

3 tablespoons pure honey

1 large scoop vanilla ice cream

roasted, salted almonds, chopped, to taste

to garnish: **whipped cream and a maraschino**

• Into a sundae tulip pour 1 tablespoon of the honey, then add the large scoop of the vanilla ice cream. Pour the remaining 2 tablespoons of honey over the ice cream and sprinkle with roasted, salted almonds. Top with whipped cream and a maraschino.

Summer Syllabub Trifle

Anyone looking for an exquisitely light and frothy dessert for entertaining on those hot lazy days of summer will do well to try this trifle, inspired partly by a Good Housekeeping *recipe.*

[SERVES 4 TO 6]

12 to 15 ladyfingers

1 to 1 1/2 pounds mixed summer fruits: raspberries, strawberries (sliced or halved), loganberries, red and black currants

sugar • 16 amaretti biscuits • 3 egg whites

5 tablespoons (6 ounces) superfine sugar

1/3 cup (5 ounces) dry white wine

juice of 1/2 lemon • 2 tablespoons brandy

3/4 cup heavy cream

• Line a glass bowl with a layer of ladyfingers. Cover with the mixed fruits, reserving some of the fruits to decorate the top of the trifle. Sprinkle with a little sugar, according to taste. Top with a layer of amaretti biscuits.

•Whisk the egg whites until stiff. Gradually add half the sugar and continue whisking until the meringue holds its shape. Fold in the remaining sugar. Carefully pour the wine, lemon juice and brandy over the egg whites and fold in gently.

•Whip the cream until it just holds its shape and then fold this into the frothy meringue mixture. Now pour this over the amaretti. Leave to stand for several hours in a cool place to enable the biscuits to become moist.

• Decorate with the reserved fruits.
