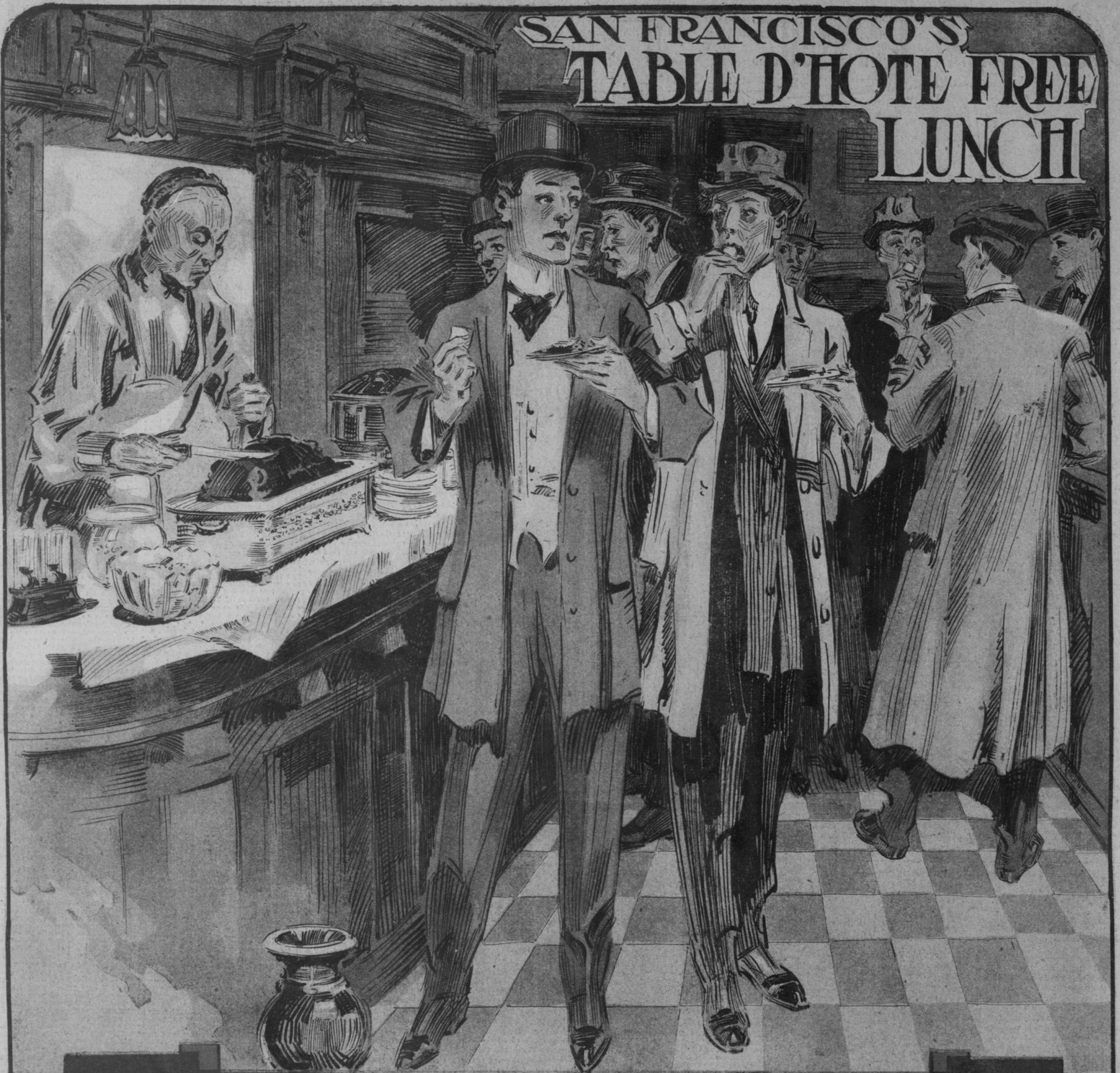


SAN FRANCISCO'S TABLE D'HOTE FREE LUNCH



This is the table d'hote dinner any well dressed man may eat in San Francisco at a total cost of nothing:

- RELISHES
- Olives. Pickled Onions.
- SOUP
- Clam Chowder.
- FISH
- Boiled salmon. Boiled potatoes.
- ENTREES
- Fried liver. Baked ham. Saratoga chips.
- ROAST
- Prime beef au jus.
- SALAD
- Tomatoes and lettuce.
- DESSERT
- Pie. Fruit cake. Cheese.

By Thomas G. Springer

"Where shall I eat?" the sad man said.
"Where shall I dine today?
Where can I get my meat and bread
Before I hit the hay?"

"WELL, Jack, let's dress for dinner," said my partner, after consulting a public clock, for our own elaborate time pieces were now several weeks in the custody of a trusting relative. I could see no reason for him adding insult to the injury of Fortune, for the subject of dinner was not a light one, or rather, to be paradoxical, was a light one, so I said rather bitterly, "Are you addressing me?"

"I am addressing an invitation to you," he replied, apparently oblivious to any sarcasm on my part. "If you are going to accept it, you'll have to hurry," and with that he began his own toilet with all seriousness. Knowing all too well the state of our combined finances and the fact that he had no individual means of supporting such a statement I began to have grave doubts of my partner's sanity or honesty. Nevertheless, I followed suit into my best one, thinking heaven that I still had it and a clean collar. In a few moments two young gentlemen whose exterior gave no hint of the mockery it covered strolled out upon the street, hustling elbowing the crowd that hurried home to dinner. The sight of these hunger-spurred folks, each with

some predestined goal, angered me. I turned savagely to my nonchalant companion.

"See here," I growled, "what do you mean by making a joke of such a desperate situation?"

"I mean that, having exhausted all our legitimate resources, we must now descend to the table d'hote free lunch."

"But we haven't even the price of a drink!"

"I know that too well; but we have a swell front and no well dressed man need go hungry in San Francisco. We will do a progressive table d'hote dinner. As I am host I expect you to place yourself in my hands."

It required no stretch of reason now to convince me that my partner's own reason had succumbed to his unappeased appetite. I looked at him, a great pity welling up in my heart. "Come on home, Dick," I said, kindly. "I will arm myself with a piece of gas pipe and procure food, if I am jailed for it."

He cast a look of scorn at me. "Long association should teach me never to cast my pearls of wit into 'your sty,'" he said unkindly. "I will now, in the coarse and vulgar English to which your barbaric ears are attuned, wise you? We are to dine, by necessity, in saloons—not the low saloons with sawdust on the floor, but in the glittering, gladsome cafes which are so conveniently conspicuous in this, our fair city. We will not evade the custodian of the 'steam' kegs on the south side, but, just now, will walk gracefully past the white coated bar keeper of the two for joint, who will be too busy with his duties to notice two well dressed strangers carelessly strolling to the convenient washroom at the rear. This will alleviate any suspicion on the part of the guardian of the lunch counter when we saunter back for a bit."

A great light illuminated my understanding, even as the electric lights of our "havens of hope" were illuminating the gathering dusk. Then the cold fog of incredulity crept in upon me like the sea fog which swept down Market street and dimmed the radiance of the promise. "But suppose they get onto us?" I almost gasped.

"They won't unless you crab the act," he replied. "Just stick close to father and emulate his careless grace and you will sleep the sleep of the just on a full stomach."

"But I can't sleep on my stomach," I protested. "Some day I will put you to sleep," he promised, grimly, "and the position will not affect your rest. But this is where we begin with the relishes," and, glancing up, I followed him into a bar in Kearny street near the foot of Geary.

My heart fluttered with some timidity. I must acknowledge, but it was even as he had said. It was a little after 5 and the offices in the vicinity had poured forth their hoard of thirsty clerks, newspapermen and merchants. The bar was two deep with them, elbowing each other for drinks or chatting in groups of two or three. We walked slowly through to the wash-

room in the rear, sauntered carelessly to the lunch counter and ate an olive or two, a crisp radish and several pickled onions, then we gained the street leisurely and without molestation. It was so simple that my courage and appetite rose simultaneously.

"Where next?" I asked, eagerly.

He told me, and we made our way across Market street. It was even more crowded than the place we had quitted. A hum of conversation and a conglomeration of mixed drinks and metaphors was in the air. But it was Friday night and overshadowing it all the toothsome odor of clam chowder coaxed seductively.

Our strategic move to the rear was hastily accomplished; for in the first flush of success and hunger my timidity vanished. We accepted the little cups of steaming broth from the white aproned celestial in the alcove, munched a cracker or two, then were on our way to the next course. We turned the corner and up Market street. We had now to cast about for a job, so we lined for the first glittering doorway. The suckers were strung along the bar, useful as well as ornamental. We passed their friendly screen and gained our goal. A treat awaited us. The attendant lifted the cover of a steaming vessel. Cautiously I hid behind a piece of salmon as alluring as a rosy bride blushing behind her veil. We accepted a portion, supplemented with a cute little boiled potato, pale as a bridemaid. I wanted a second helping, but the crowd at the bar thinned a little and my guilty conscience drove me to the street.

Then came another buffet a block up the street and the first entree. It was a cozy little place, nesting modestly at the rear of the big building's wide rotunda. The attendance here was not large—in fact, it was so small that I was for "beating it" before we tried to beat it. But Dick, with a careless grace I strove in vain to imitate, possessed himself of a plate decorated with a small but attractive bit of fried liver. I did not care much for this course; besides, the place was not nearly as cheery as the rest we had visited, so I was glad to hurry through my portion and waited for Dick in the rotunda. He came out, contrary to my expectations, on his feet, instead of his head, and asked me what my hurry was. "I affected not to hear him and we gained the street in time to dodge across ahead of the heavy laden cars now on the crowded trips, Dick and I fairly revelled in its atmosphere of cheery hospitality. To be sure, it was almost too crowded for comfort, the portion of baked ham they served us was ridiculously small and I had hard work to grab some Saratoga chips to accompany it—still, after the quiet of the last cafe, it was a great relief; at least we were safe from hostile eyes and husky brogans.

I left with some regret, but the journey was not

far, and the next place radiated the same atmosphere of crowded good-fellowship. Incidentally the roast was delicious. By this time the strategic move to the rear was abandoned, for it seemed a foolish waste of time. We were served with a beautiful rare portion and had to step back with our plates to eat it. This idea of standing up was the only disagreeable feature of our meal so far, but as the hospitality had been so lavish and the surroundings so congenial we really had no cause for complaint at this minor inconvenience. By this time hunger was a dim and misty memory, and the fact that we were traveling the primrose path without the moisture to make it blossom did not affect us sorely, though I think it would have been a vast improvement if the wash basins had supported a water glass—and I made a mental note of it to be suggested at some future date when I was in a position to speak with authority.

Having disposed of the roast we sauntered leisurely in search of salad. We found a most delicious one of lettuce and tomatoes a few doors up the street. It was by far the most luxuriously appointed bar along the line, and we were extremely grateful to the patrons that made it possible for the proprietor to please the eye as well as appease the appetite. The delicacy of its color scheme, the really beautiful mural decoration over the elegant bar and the handsome marble statue beneath it were a joy to the eye. Also the Chinaman who presided over the cuisine was an artist at salad. I regretted that the attendance was too small for any prolonged stay, but the hour was growing late and there was still the dessert to be considered. So around the corner we went to a genial though garish place in Powell street.

Here the toothsome if plebeian pie awaited us. The place was jammed, for it is a popular corner, and we could scarcely repress a smile as the genial proprietor "glad handed" us and conducted us in person to our last course. He also recommended a fried dough concoction in which reposed currants—suggestive of a careless cook and an absence of screens, but nevertheless better than they looked. Our host did not tarry to overhear our comments, but hastened to greet other and, if he did not know it, more profitable guests.

Only cheese was left to us now as we strolled carelessly down the street to a modest but elegant bar. The crowd was thinning and our appetite had lost its edge, and we lingered but briefly over its disposal. Out into the street we wandered. We searched our pockets for our last crumbs of tobacco and rolled them in our crumpled brown papers. Puffing contentedly, for our hearts were at peace and our stomachs full, we strolled away, and as we wandered we asked ourselves, "Where in this broad land of ours is there another city that offers such open hospitality as this careless city of San Francisco? But the question arises, What will these genial hosts say when they are informed? Ah, well, no matter! They fed us sumptuously, and we didn't even have to thank them!"