

BOHEMIAN SAN FRANCISCO

25¢

BY
Henry Evans

With Illustrations from Old Woodcuts



San Francisco, The Porpoise Bookshop



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By HENRY EVANS

Bohemian atmosphere demands a cosmopolitan population. Ever since the gold rush San Francisco has had a fantastic mixture of people. Plenty of different colors of skin, kinds of religion, domestic and foreign languages, restaurants, bars, bawdy houses, harmless but colorful extroverts, and a history in the arts which is almost beyond belief.

Although there are plenty of people mentioned in this book who are still living, and lots of places of interest described which are going strong right now, it should not be used as a guidebook, since for moral and other reasons, some of the most shocking places are not mentioned nor their entertainments described.

I am very fortunate in having known personally a fair number of the people described in these pages . . . some of them are still around, and when you walk the streets of San Francisco you will see them.

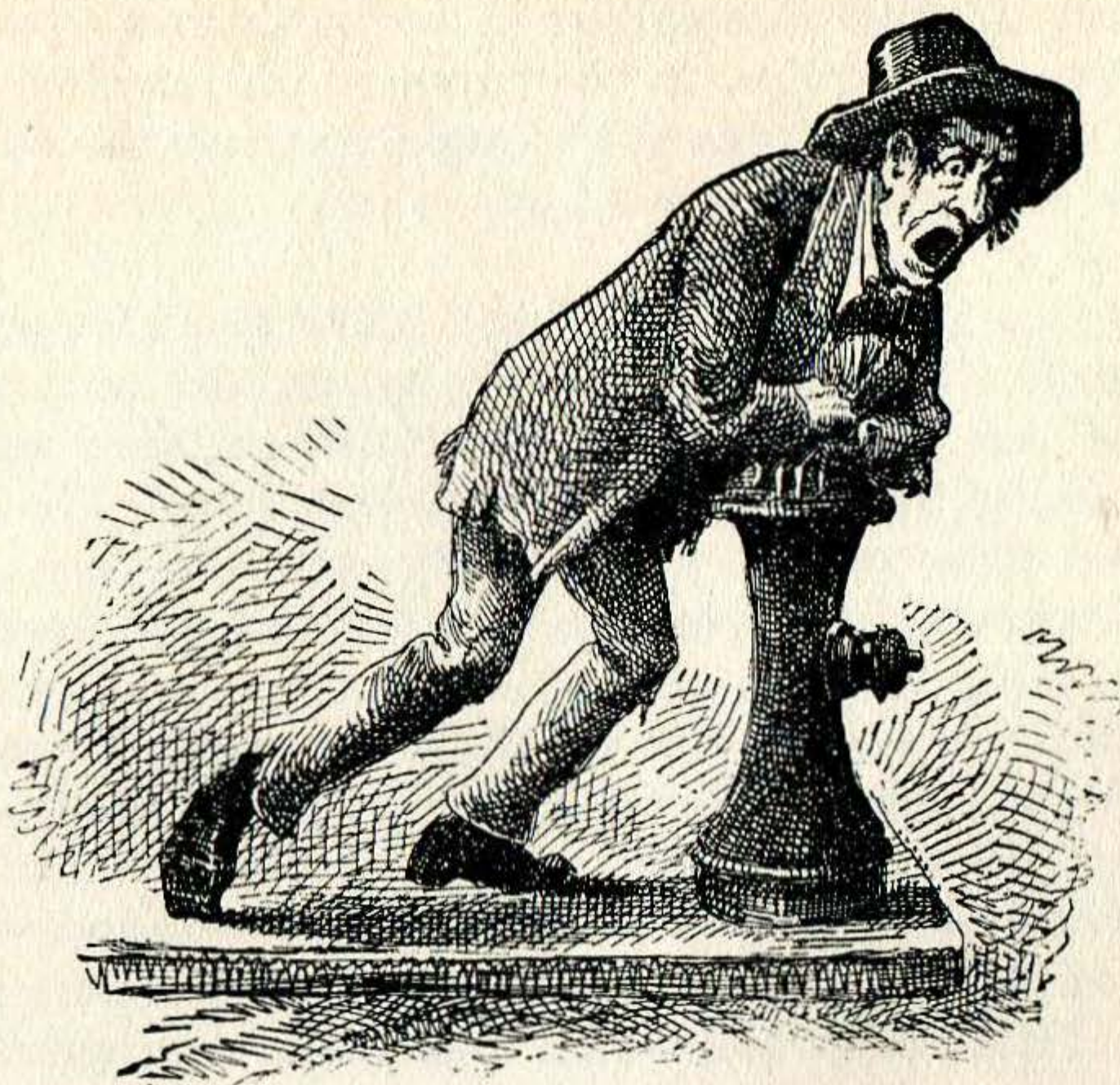
I would like to have fifteen cents in American money for every time I have left Izzy's with my head whirling and my brain full of brilliant images of Isidore, John and Teddy and the thousands of customers who came and went. Izzy's place was on Pacific above Stockton. In its heyday before World War II, for 25c you could get a hamburger there made of ground up steak, served on half a loaf of sour dough French bread, a sandwich that would constitute a full meal for a fair-sized wolf. For another two bits you could get a big oval platter of hot

French Fried Potatoes that were superb and for ten cents more you could get an eight-ounce glass of red wine. Izzy was originally (says the legend) an old time Shanghaier . . . taking drunks from bars and delivering them, for a price, to the captains of outgoing ships who were in need of men. The poor stiff would wake up the next day out on the Pacific with a swollen head and a long voyage to the Orient ahead of them.

Izzy weighed over 300 pounds and had a bullet head. He wore his hat most of the time. He would remove his hat on rare occasions to the great surprise and pleasure of the assembled regulars and tourists. There was a mural back of the bar, the fate of which I have not discovered, which showed Izzy, John, Teddy and a number of more or less permanent guests in various poses. A very hot and powerful grape brandy called Grappa was served at Izzy's. The place was noted for its dirt, profanity (which Izzy didn't like), excellent steaks, low-priced drinks and general color. Sunday morning, Teddy (who was bouncer as well as swamper) used to give the place a thorough cleaning. The broken teeth, glass, furniture and discarded garments would make a noticeable pile. Sunday afternoons at Izzy's were very quiet and pleasant. I used to sit and watch Coit Tower through the kitchen window which was at the far end of the bar. The sun, a strange visitor in that place, would stream in and create a nice glow. Izzy is dead for some years now, but the legend grows, and the memories soften the violent past . . . distant intoxication!

George Sterling was a poet and one of the original members of the Bohemian Club which is now Bohemian in name only. People say that Sterling committed suicide with booze but I prefer to think that he died of exhaustion. A protege of Bierce and a ward of Jack London, Sterling was a man of many talents . . . the stories about him are many. One night Sterling decided he would like to take a swim in Stowe Lake (in Golden Gate Park) in the nude. He proceeded to do so but when he came out of the water to get his clothes, a big Irish cop was waiting for him. The results were most unexpected. The cop ran him in, but so great was the city's love of George that the Chief of Police issued him a permit to swim in the nude in San Francisco any time he liked.

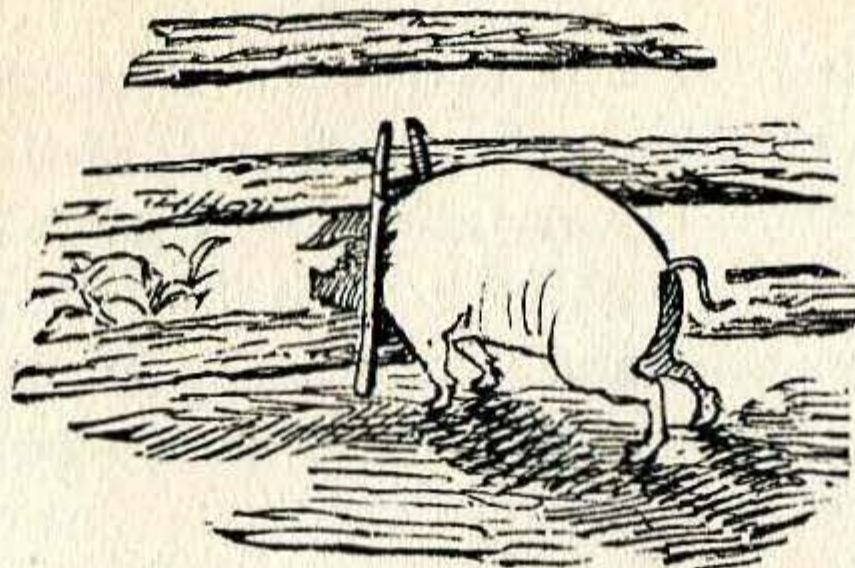
Another incident of which even many San Franciscans are perhaps unaware is the time George Sterling, Joaquin Miller, and a gal whose name I will not mention, posed for photographs to illustrate an edition of *The Rubaiyat* . . . the pictures look very proper and quaint now.



BACCHUS (FROM A MODERN STATUE.)

I remember when I was a student spending some pleasant hours in Union Square. The decor has been considerably changed by the construction of a huge underground garage, but the column in the center with the Statue of a Winged Victory (Dewey at Manila Bay) was taken apart piece by piece and put back in the exact same central location. I remember one morning walking down Post Street and it was summer, but cool, and there, prancing across the green stretch of lawn was Ted Shawn, getting in a little early-morning practice. His troupe was performing at one of the local theaters. His costumed caprices were certainly interesting as a change from the usual wrinkled pigeon feeders . . . even though a little odd, perhaps.

In former years they gave band concerts in Union Square at noon-time and I do not doubt that some of the hotel guests with rooms looking onto the square did not feel that this was very conducive to sleeping off the night before.



There was a time when Chinatown was limited in extent by unwritten laws. The police still wear plain-clothes in Chinatown, and you can still smoke opium there if you really want to and are prepared to pay for it.

Grant Avenue (formerly Dupont Street) is the main street in Chinatown for gawkers. Clay, Washington, and Jackson (between Kearny and Stockton) are very interesting as well as such little alleys as Waverly Place.

In recent years there has been pretty much of an argument, among sophisticated people at least, that the anatomy of the Chinese female is quite similar to that of the average Occidental female. A number of curious myths have persisted, however.

Most of the Chinese in San Francisco, and the United States as a whole for that matter, hail from little towns near Canton. The dialect they speak is Cantonese and their food is the kind that you would get if you found yourself hungry in Canton, except that the ingredients are better and the result is probably better too.

Many foods served in Chinatown are imported from China even now and drugs as well, through Hong Kong. The better cooks and druggists are important men in the Chinese community. If a fine cook leaves one restaurant for another, the clientele will usually follow the cook.

San Francisco Chinese have been multiplying very well and are now to be found living in most parts of the city, but Chinatown is still Chinese and if you want to gamble your money away, gorge yourself with exotic food, or indulge in any number of curious vices, it is still quite possible to do it there.

There has been an infiltration of neon and modern storefronts, but you can still see the old ladies inching along on bound feet, reverently supported by middle-aged granddaughters.

North Beach is bounded by Chinatown on its south, Russian Hill on the west, and the waterfront on the north and east. It includes a large part of the Italian and Mexican colonies, the colorful and fragrant wholesale produce district and, of course, Fisherman's Wharf.

Many of the Bohemian bars are and were in North Beach. The most genuine street intersection in the city is that where Broadway, Columbus and Grant meet.

A recently built up section which is on the edge of North Beach and neither fish nor fowl as far as Bohemia is concerned is the so-called International Settlement running down both sides of the street in the 500 numbers on Pacific. These joints were war-born and designed to relieve the military personnel and weary war workers of their loose loot, which they did. They are tourist traps now and not very good ones at that.

Now if you want to see and hear and smell the unbathed, raucus Bohemians in the rough and raw, beards and all, go to a little dump of a bar called Vesuvio Cafe, run by Henri Lenoir... who was at one time playing in a jazz band in Switzerland. Tending bar there along with Henri is Luke Gibney, the best portrait painter in San Francisco, who has Liffey Water, as well as blood in his veins. Henri, bereted, mustached, and full of wit and good humor, and Luke a good purveyor of Irish humor make the Vesuvio Cafe a hangout for young artists, writers, intellectual longshoremen, the avante garde, the derriere garde, and the old Guard. This bar now sells hard liquor as well as wine and beer. A number of unusual drinks are found here... and of beer they have about 50 kinds, including many exotic importations. It is one of the very few joints running right now that is definitely Bohemian, but not queer. The fruit parlors we will come to later.

Another North Beach establishment which merits examination is the Dante Billiard Parlor at 521 Broadway, just across the street and around the corner from Vesuvio. The main man in charge is John... an ex-wrestler, and built like a couple of Mack trucks. Very friendly though, is John, and a square shooter. Just behave yourself and you won't get mauled. Here at the Dante Billiard Parlor there is a bar just inside the front door where you can buy sandwiches such as you have never seen before. Great slabs of sour dough French bread raised five or six inches high with contents of your choosing such as gorgonzola, real Italian salami, proscuito, anchovies... about twenty different



A STREET SCENE ON A RAINY NIGHT.

kinds of cheese, dozens of different kinds of pickles, onions, condiments, etc., etc. With one of these fabulous sandwiches and a tall glass of draft beer (or even a cup of coffee) ... you can turn around gently into the general view the place affords and watch the dark skinned billiard players who are as graceful as ballerinas, and twice as serious.

Joshua A. Norton (better known as Emperor Norton I), arrived in San Francisco in December of 1849. By the time of his death in January, 1880, he had achieved international fame as the grandest madman in the world. His first few years in San Francisco were spent as a rather ordinary business man, but he lost a large fortune in an effort to corner the rice market in 1853 and in the debts, litigation and illness that followed he went completely off his rocker. He did little to reveal the future brilliance of his career until about 1859 when his first proclamation was published. He styled himself "Norton I, Emperor of the United States" and the San Francisco papers were full of his ultimatums, proclamations, and manifestos. He issued bonds, which

people bought good-naturedly at nominal prices; he ate in Free Lunch restaurants, dressed in a blue uniform with gold epaulettes, a beaver hat with a rosette and a bright feather, and he carried a cane shaped like twisted serpents and in overcast or rainy weather he carried a three-colored umbrella. He was escorted by two dogs called Bummer and Lazarus, who performed, in addition to catching rats along the docks, a number of useful services and they were deeply attached to the Emperor. The dogs died in 1865 and the public grief was great. Norton had a collection of hats, a free room provided by the Masons, free admission to any place of amusement and free access to the columns of the San Francisco newspapers, who found him excellent copy and often gave him a terrific ribbing in the form of communiques from various crowned heads, Jeff Davis, Lincoln, etc., etc. Norton was no fool; he played his part with a flourish and when he died climbing up the California Street hill, the passers-by who came to assist him in his grand exit knew that San Francisco had lost one of the most charming madmen who ever lived.

(The following is a fond farewell . . . BCG closed during 1955)
There will never be an end to the writing of books about San Francisco bars and restaurants but there is one of my favorite restaurants which cannot be overpraised. I am thinking of the Bay City Grill on Turk near Market in the heart of the old tenderloin... dear to the palates of every San Franciscan who knows anything about good food. The Bay City Grill is the kind of old place you dream about, when you are in an uncivilized city in the Middle West, or stationed on some sand-blown island a thousand miles beyond the gates of burning hell. The waiters have been there since the beginning of time, and they have found out what goes with what and why. Everything is a la carte, everything is good, and everything is priced fairly. If you order a two-bit green salad, they will make it to order for you. If you want your lobster broiled just so . . . that's the way you'll get it. The chowder is superb and the general fare is uncommonly good. You can eat upstairs in booths, downstairs at tables, or sit at the big wooden counter and watch the cooks at work... everything is out in the open and everything is genuine, including the sawdust on the floor. Of course, you may elbow up to some moderately tough characters, but mind your own business and all will be well. The tough customers make for good food. Wise cooks don't shove inferior food out to goons, because tenderloin goons are usually very particular about their vittles.



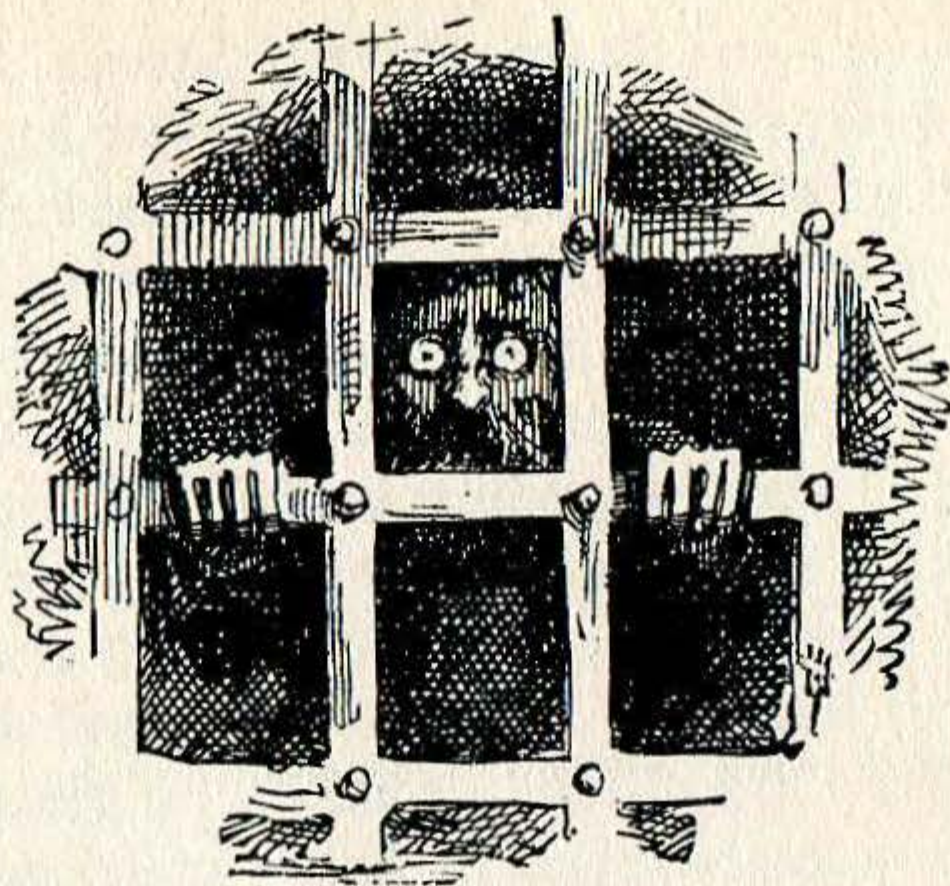
SNIFFING THE BATTLE FROM AFAR.

One of the most colorful and persistent Bohemians (and how he would hate that name!) is William McDevitt, L.L.M., etc. A long-time bookseller in various parts of the city but longest at the Enormous Room on Sutter Street between Fillmore and Steiner; these premises are now occupied by a plumber and a druggist. I purchased the stock of McDevitt as an addition to my own stock when he was forced to move out of the store and into semi-retirement. McDevitt was, and is, a soapboxer at heart (he told me so himself), and a socialist, and an advocate of the single tax, simplified spelling, an expert on shorthand, the movies, horse racing, and his adopted father, Father Tabb. McDevitt was an Alaska pioneer before the Klondike, a participant in a famous Utopian colony in the Northwest (Equality), a member of the election commission in San Francisco, and one year a candidate for Mayor of San Francisco on the Socialist ticket. When Emma Gold-

man came to San Francisco McDevitt debated with her on the public platform and he claims that she said that he was one of the toughest and wildest opponents she ever had...from "Red Emma" this would be quite a compliment. He can still talk on virtually any subject, coherently and at considerable length, even though he is pushing ninety. His store was a gathering place for the finest collection of odd-balls imaginable, of all shades of literary and political opinion. He had an incredible collection of old magazines, posters, song sheets, ephemera and books by the tens of thousands, dust covered, confused, piled, stacked, littered and thrown...certain portions of his shop were roped off and the intriguing mountains of junk were like a mirage. You could only look in the few small places that weren't roped off. McDevitt was a good friend of George Sterling, and many of the other celebrities who flourished in San Francisco from 1909 to the present time. Above all else, McDevitt is a gentleman, no matter what sort of dastardly scoundrel may confront him, he never lost his manners. How many book dealers do you know who don't lose their manners once in a while?

Time was, and not so many years ago, when you could get off the Oakland Ferry and hop a muni car for a nickel and in about twenty-five minutes you'd be out at the beach. Now Bohemians pay 15c to get on a trackless trolley and are quite lucky if they can go from the new Bay Bridge Terminal to the Beach in an hour.

When you're downtown or in North Beach (and these are really the only Bohemian areas) it is almost as fast to walk as it is to grab a cab or attempt public transportation. Part of this transportation problem is due to the narrowness of the streets, which were mainly laid out by a surveyor named Jasper O'Farrell, after whom O'Farrell Street was named. He had a certain fondness for spirits and the merchants provided him with such to keep him from chopping off hunks of their property to make wider streets; the sons and grandsons of these pioneers are cursing them now. I once had a very fine daguerreotype of Jasper showing him seated, a big dog at his side, a broad-brimmed hat on, a rifle in his hand and a big knife in his belt. He had a rich dark beard and must have been a strong fellow. But he botched up our streets in true Bohemian fashion...and in the long run all for the best. The western towns laid out by the Mormons have nice broad



streets, but very little charm. San Francisco's streets (downtown) were laid out with a great deal of spirit.

Rome and San Francisco and a few less important towns are each built on seven hills. As far as true Bohemians are concerned the only two hills in San Francisco that are habitable are Telegraph Hill and Potrero Hill. Telegraph Hill used to be an artists' paradise... it is anything but that now. I remember "before the war" we had six good rooms on Edith Street for \$10.00 a month. The same building has been 'remodeled' and the flats now rent for an even hundred dollars. Telegraph Hill was once covered with little houses and ramshackle dumps that could be had for a few dollars a month. Now there is a bus to haul hundreds of tourists up the hill every day and apartment houses going up and generally the atmosphere is quite different.

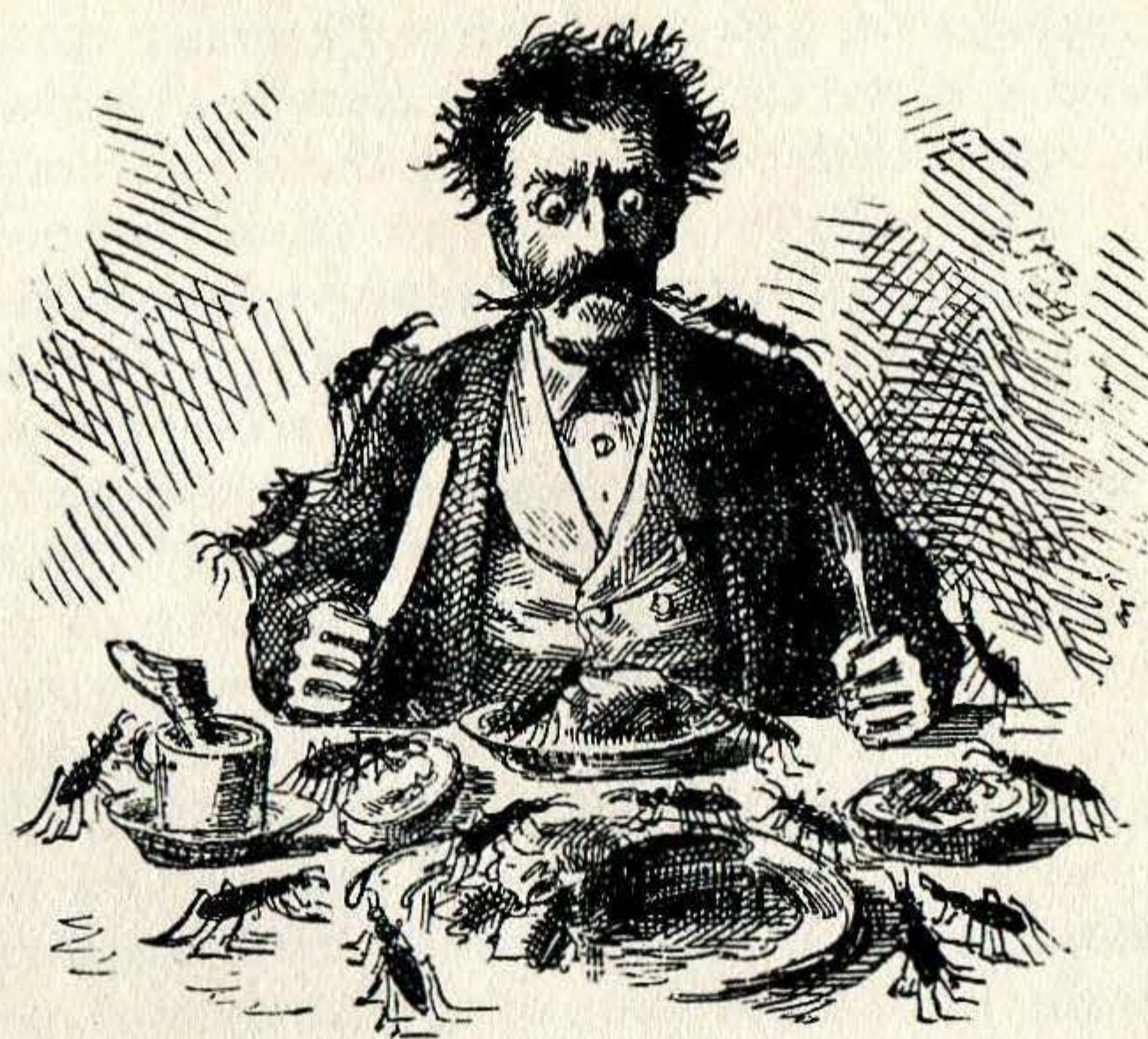
There promises to be a good Bohemian Colony on Potrero Hill, the last stand of the milk-drinking Molokan Russians. What with its having the best climate in town (there are actually a dozen distinctly different climates within the boundaries of the city), and its relatively unclimbable slopes, the ordinary tourist will be discouraged from climbing up its streets, and even if he does it will get him nowhere because the saloons are very ordinary and there is no public entertainment as such on the hill. The steep slopes of the hill make it unattractive to motorists and as a result it is quite a remote place right within the city. The Potrero Hill area is encircled by an industrial area and because of this many people are unwilling to take up habitation there for fear of being considered to live on the wrong side of the tracks.

The tracks, by the way, run down Market Street. If you live on the south side you are about eighteen notches below human as far as the 'rest of the town' is concerned. The 'South of Market Boys' is a sort of Chamber of Commerce affair, but they will never have anything to do with the fine or lively arts in the foreseeable future.

The speed limit in San Francisco is 25 miles per hour, and aside from walking through red lights, the pedestrian has the right of way. As any half squizzled Bohemian will testify, the San Franciscan is a gent until he gets behind the wheel of his car. If you are partially lit, call yourself a cab and go home, or to some other indoor location that is comfortable, but **GET OFF THE STREETS!** Your life is not worth two cents if you are a pedestrian in San Francisco and not able to broad jump at least twelve feet. Insurance salesmen, assistant managers of small branch banks, and similar persons take out the grudges and hatred on pedestrians, especially in Bohemian areas.

The cable cars are, of course, one of the most nostalgic things about the city, and are one means of getting around. The number of cable lines has been greatly reduced in recent years. You can still get on a cable car at the foot of California Street (at Market), and ride three miles to Van Ness Avenue. This is a real fine ride because there are no curves. You can sit on the exposed, outside seats and get all sorts of fresh air, views, etc., etc. If you are in good shape and out for a time, take the cable car at Powell and Market that runs over Nob Hill and down to Fisherman's Wharf. This is a jolly ride for 15c with a couple of curves thrown in. The cable cars are powered by a cable which runs along almost silently under the street. The man who operates the car is called the gripman and he controls a steel "grip" which goes down into a continuous slot in the street and grabs the steel cable. The conductor is also brakeman when necessary. The cable cars have been threatened by extinction by various powers... mainly the companies that sell the city transport system the expensive new buses and trackless trolleys. The cable cars may break down occasionally, but they have their points... the girls sitting on the outside seats of the Powell cable cars present a long-legged view of things at times.

Time was when a good Bohemian could amble down to the foot of Hyde Street and take the Ferry to Sausalito, a pleasant ride across



BUMMERS ON THE RAID.

the Bay. After the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge this service was abandoned. The Greyhound bus makes very good time but has no bar.

You can still ride across the Bay on a ferryboat, however... the Southern Pacific maintains a service from the Oakland Mole to the Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street... this service is primarily intended to transport passengers from the railroad terminus in Oakland to San Francisco and reverse, but they will sell you a round trip on the ferry if you like. Before the Bay Bridge was finished all commuting was done by ferry and the pleasure of these rides will never be forgotten. There is also a ferry still operating between Richmond and San Rafael in the northern end of the Bay... this is primarily an auto ferry and will doubtless continue for a number of years... at least until a north bay crossing is achieved. One of the most famous California artists, William Keith, gained his livelihood for a time by painting murals on the interior walls of the ferryboats. Whether or not any of these murals still exist I do not know, but if they do, I hope they have not turned dark and brown the way most of his paintings have.

If you want to determine the character of a city one good way is to examine its grocery stores. Bohemian San Francisco has almost every kind imaginable and you can tell pretty closely what section of town you are in by what the grocer displays in the boxes and crates out on the sidewalk. In Chinatown you will see dried portions of fish and birds and other animals which would send your appetite scampering if you did not know what delicacies they are... Chinese vegetables look like the things you see painted on old porcelain bowls, but being possessed of wonderful strong smells they provoke your nose as well as your eyes into hope of pleasure. The Chinese butchers chopping roast duck (pressed almost flat) or browned roast pork present a very strange sight. The grease running through their fingers is intriguing and repulsive at the same time. The live turtles, frogs, rabbits, fish, geese, ducks, chickens, squabs, etc., in their window-view cages and pools... and the dried seahorses neatly arranged on the little blue and white plates. Chinese grocery stores doubtless sent Bret Harte and Mark Twain off into the same or similar mental meanderings as they did Kipling, Stevenson... and perhaps even such later day saints as Gertrude Stein and Robinson Jeffers.

The Italian markets are delightful... so many different kinds of cheese and wine and dry paste... and their fish and poultry displays provoke wonderful pangs of hunger. I remember one morning strolling into Buon Gusto at Columbus and Green and seeing in the poultry department the most impressive array of the tiniest birds (for eating purposes) that I had ever seen. They were little blackbirds, sold by the dozen and to be served three or four to a person... to be roasted with perhaps some little exotic stuffing and served at a seduction supper... along with a bottle or two of Mr. Korbel's champagne and perhaps a little cake of cream and pastry from the Stella Bakery. I often wonder what the Italians of San Francisco do with all the olive oil they must buy... if the displays in the grocery stores are any indication of the amount they use. There must be some secret, sinful use of which I am not aware.

Many of the more or less nondescript grocery stores and restaurants in San Francisco were, until fairly recently run by Greeks. The common belief that Greek males are more homosexually inclined than other males of Near Eastern origin is open to much doubt. In former days they maintained a number of coffee houses in the neighborhood



CALIFORNIA LODGING-ROOM.

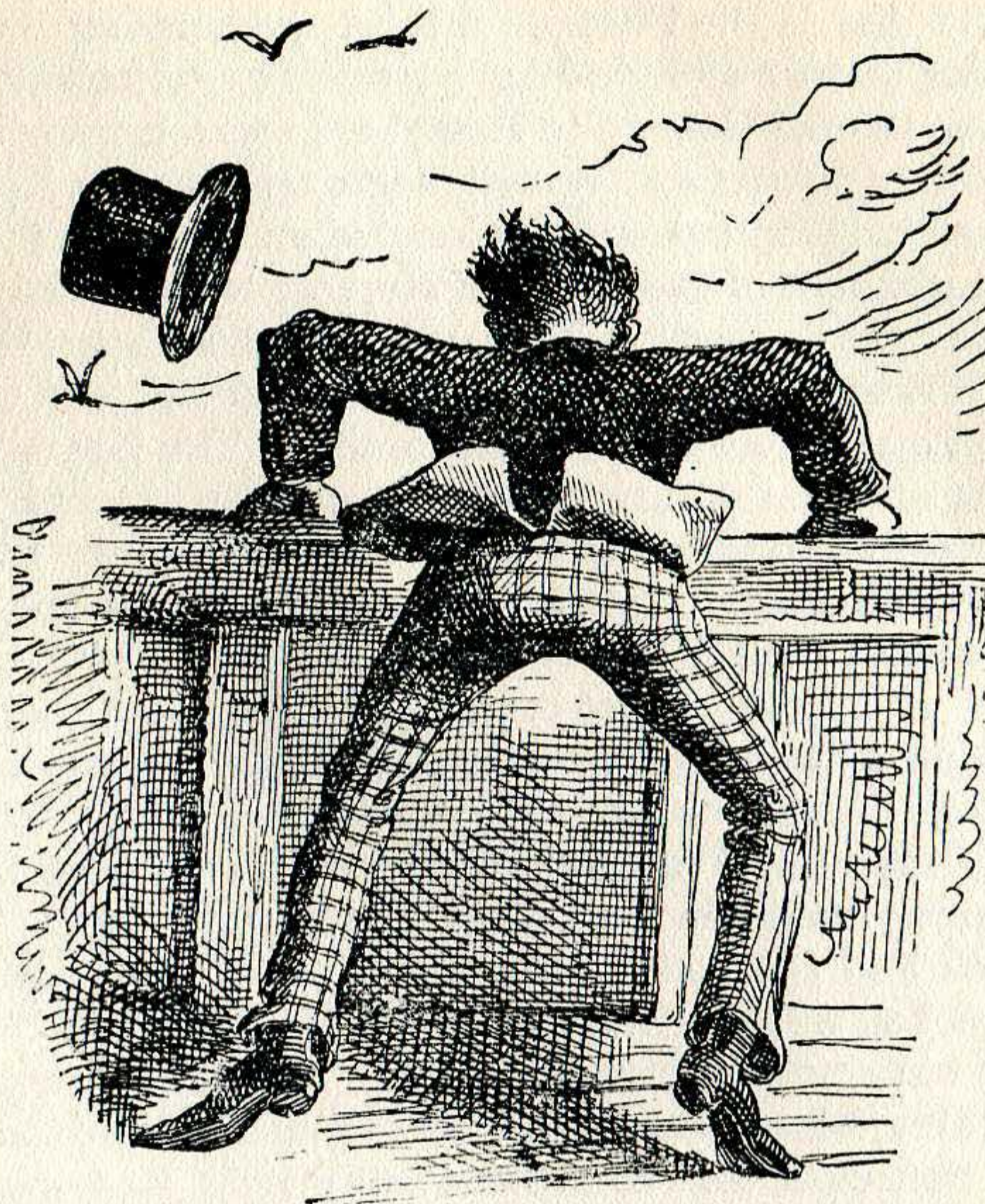
of Third and Folsom, for male customers only, and to make this clear, each place had but one toilet. The entertainment in these Greek coffee houses was live: a violinist, a clarinetist, a zimbalin player and possibly a plump girl with an odd-shaped Greek drum on her lap... when things got going well she would urge herself out onto the floor and wiggle through a portion of a belly dance, to the great delight of the assembled grocers, restaurateurs and miscellaneous card sharpers... they would then pelt her with half dollars for a while until one of the customers signified that he was ready to perform. The men were excellent dancers... mostly solo work but sometimes a pair would dance together with the aid of the indispensable handkerchief. I never had endurance enough to see how late these places stayed open. They served tiny cups of Turkish coffee and little glasses of a white fire in liquid form called Uzzo. A couple of jiggers of Uzzo and you were ready for anything... well, almost anything. I have escorted ladies into these strongholds, but have always felt that I was transgressing when I did. The strange rhythm of the music made the gals nervous... it was probably intended to.

In recent years many bars have had reputations for being beehives of perversion. There is really no point in trying to list them in this booklet, as they have a disarming tendency to "change their stripes" almost overnight. The mere visit of a couple of male homosexuals to a lesbian spot might taint it for lesbian use, making it necessary for the "males" to patronize it, or else let the place decline. One of the most colorful of the old bars was The Black Cat on Montgomery Street, which, during Charlie's reign, was by far the best place for a wild drunk that an adventurer could hope for. But alas, The Black Cat no longer has the charm of days gone by, and if you have normal tendencies, you will find it very dull to say the least. Look if you must, but be careful!

We have a good healthy percentage of homosexuals to contend with, and have had from the days of the mining camps down to our own. In recent years two joints have gained some fame as hot-houses of perversion: Finnocchio's and Mona's, Gay Boys and Dikes respectively. Both of these places have gone down hill, so to speak, in recent years. I recall when Mona had a joint in a basement room on Columbus just below Pacific. One of the most colorful places for a real drunk in other days used to be the Black Cat on Montgomery between Washington and Jackson. The place changed hands and the new owner encouraged the fruit and the place went to hell. The same person bought out a nice old restaurant called the Grotto and wrecked it in the same way. Another queer place, which can't make up its mind whether it wants to be strictly pansie or strictly lesbian is the Paper Doll, but it is a very dull joint at best.

Generally speaking, queer joints are for one kind or the other, not usually both. Mostly they are very sad places, with the unhappy patrons ogling each newcomer with the hope of seeing something "unspoiled and uncrushed" ... a virgin, so to speak.

Of the oldest profession in the world San Francisco has at least its share. The real Bohemian is usually too poor to give any financial encouragement to the horizontal girls (and boys) but they do come into the Bohemian picture now and then. Sometimes whores and chippies will cruise in Bohemian bars in hopes of picking up slummers with money ... most slummers in Bohemian joints do not have money, and so the trick is for them to figure out which ones do. Professional whores do not usually try to ensconce themselves in Bohemian com-



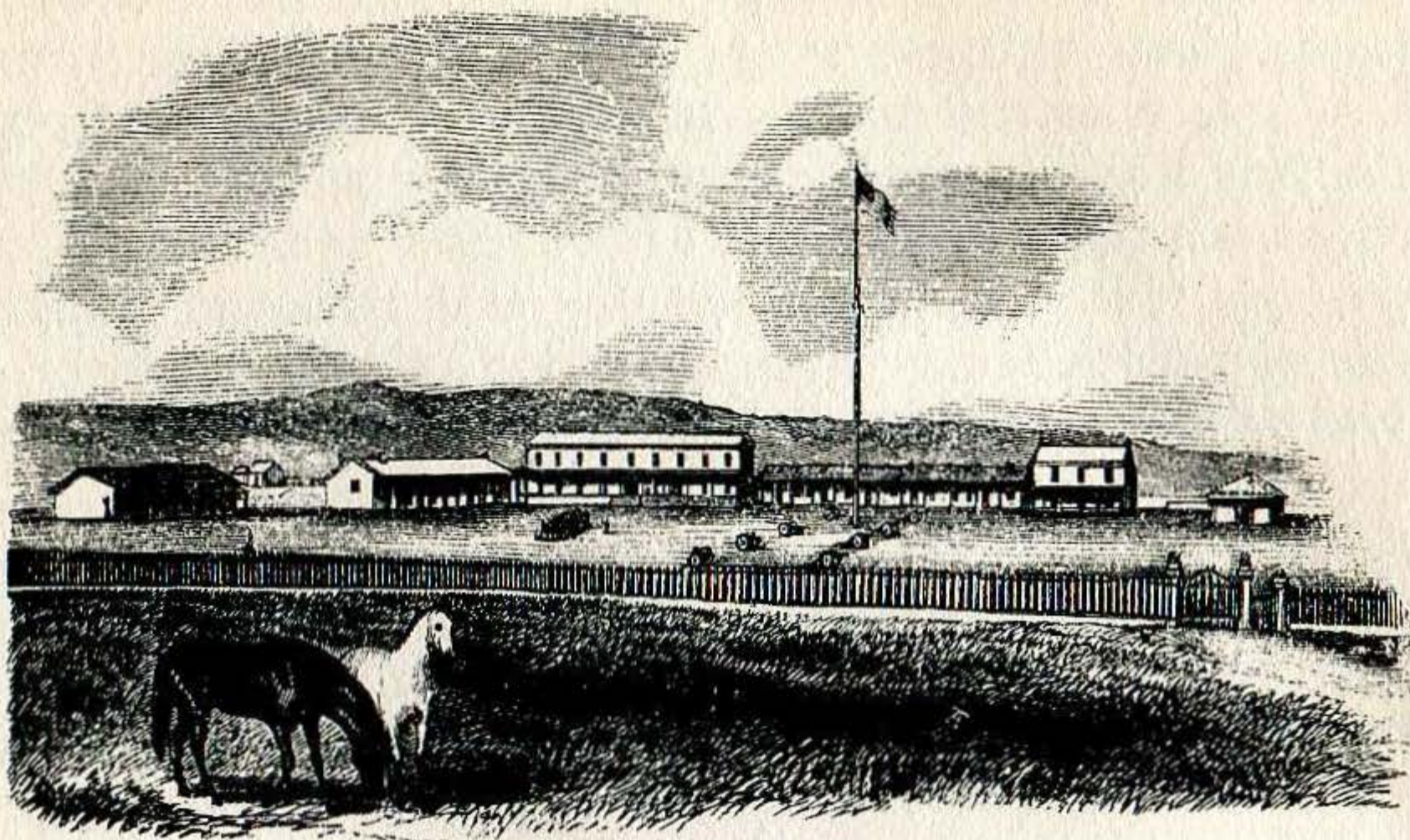
CASTING BREAD UPON THE WATERS.

pany, they mean business...but the amateurs are usually out for a meal or a flop and will try to cut into any conversation in hopes of making the grade. Generally the Bohemian will take to the amateur...but usually as a one night stand...she will have to have other talents if she is to be put upon a more permanent basis. But there are not many professional whores cruising around...they run things differently.

Some people have the idea that all Bohemians are wild and immoral...this is far from the truth. Bohemianism is as much a point of view as it is a way of living. You can approve of all sorts of unconventional activities without participating in them or supporting them. There are plenty of *voyeurs* in Bohemia, San Francisco and elsewhere.

Before World War II the Fillmore district was another lower middle class shopping district with nothing particularly remarkable about it. At the section around Geary and Post there was a coming together of a small Japanese district and a small Negro neighborhood. Right after Pearl Harbor the Japanese were re-located and the vast influx of war workers brought tens of thousands of Negroes to San Francisco. They occupied the area formerly held by the Japanese bounded approximately by Fillmore, Pine, Buchanan and Geary Streets and spread out to Presidio and over towards Sacramento. The Negro population kept growing and as a natural result a number of colored joints were opened in addition to the ones which existed before the war. A number of stories were and are circulated about the dope being sold in the Fillmore area and the general vice and corruption there, but I doubt that there is any more vice or corruption there than there is in the so-called respectable neighborhoods. Congenital bigotry on the part of the average citizen makes these stories acceptable. The pre-war "Uncle Tom" type San Francisco Negro is almost a thing of the past. Many extremely well-educated and trained professionals have come into the area and the community has become solid and relatively conservative. You will encounter a number of Negroes in North Beach joints, but I have noticed the same ones over and over again... permanent fixtures. Most of the Negroes in San Francisco are working too hard at time clock jobs to become full-fledged Bohemians... they are struggling for the security that the Bohemian has quit seeking.

San Francisco has a slow way of recognizing things. People of 'literary' importance come to town and can't understand why the townspeople don't all stand on their heads for them. Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, to give a pair of choice examples, thought they would take the place by storm. They stormed Marin County fairly well but got no wind up in San Francisco. But recognition is very slow hereabouts... sometimes never. The local art associations are strictly local... the members all paint the same way and anyone who doesn't want to paint the way the boys and girls in the local associations paint will most likely not get shown. There is more and better art in the bars in San Francisco than you will ever see in the museums... at least that is true of contemporary art. The saloon keepers have found that it



VIEW OF THE PRESIDIO.

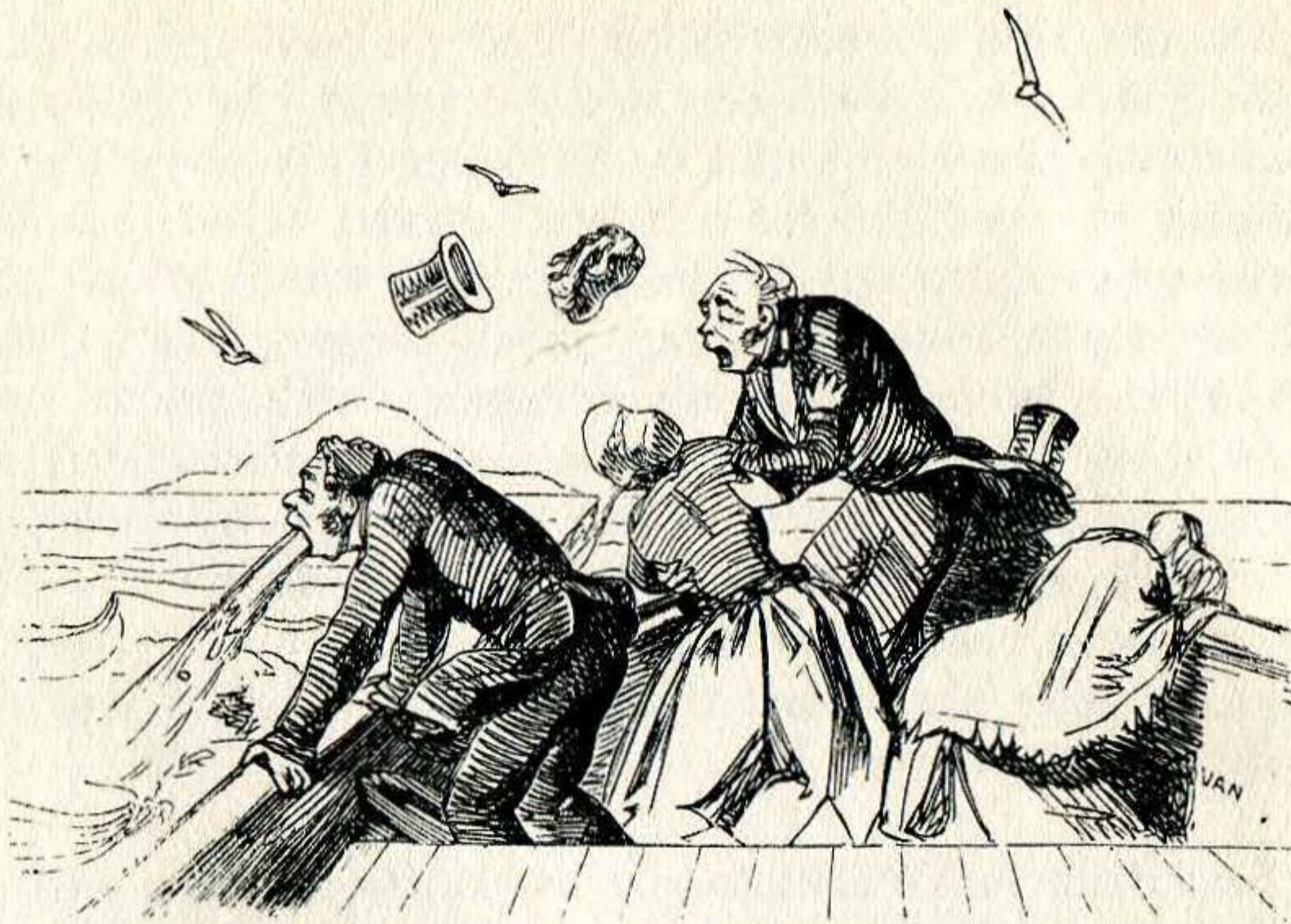
From a Photograph by Hamilton & Co.

This is a military post, that was established shortly after the arrival of the first missionaries, mainly for their protection ; it was originally occupied by Spanish troops, and afterward by Mexican, until March, 1847, when it was taken by the United States, at which time the whole force of the enemy was a single corporal. At this time, also, there were two old Spanish brass field-pieces found here, and two more near the beach, about where the end of Battery street, San Francisco, now is, and from which that street derived its name.

doesn't hurt business to have a few pictures around... they occasionally sell one and it helps to keep the slummers from falling asleep. Speaking of art in the saloon, Pat Cucaro has done a great deal for himself, and his fellow artists, in the promotion of art in the saloon. It is a well known fact that many more people buy pictures from the walls of local bars than from the walls of our local museums. Henri Lenoir has a lot to his credit when it comes to promoting local artists... he got the Iron Pot to hang its high dirty walls with paintings and later moved on to his own joint. The Iron Pot (not Lenoir) had a fire in which the artists lost their paintings... the management said "so sorry" and our phony-liberal-republican newspaper chimed in and gave the artists the horselaugh.

There have been scores of notable extroverts in San Francisco down through the years, but peer of any is the energetic Tiny Armstrong. Tiny is a large man and has a great ability in the field of eccentric costume. Tiny was for a time known as the bird-whistle man, but this is hardly an adequate description. I have never seen him decked out the same way twice. He has, in keeping with the local tradition for this type of occupation, a large collection of assorted hats, and is usually to be seen participating in parades, walking casually into the midst of public displays and performances of all kinds, swinging lightly in and out of bars, restaurants and other public places... singing, whistling, bowing, and gracefully informing one and all of his sparkling presence. Many's the public event at which Tiny is by far the most dramatic personage present. Tiny is quite a large man physically, but very light on his feet and capable of the most grandiloquent gestures. A parade in San Francisco without Tiny Armstrong is hardly a parade... and San Franciscans love parades and have lots of them. It is a known fact that parade marshals have been known to wait nervously on fiery steeds, waiting in the hope that Tiny would show up... parades have been delayed by officials pending his arrival. I feel sure that he was not consulted when the tin owls were put up on the City Hall roof, with the idea of scaring away the pigeons, which the mayor cannot stand. Now if the mayor had consulted Tiny about what he should do I am sure that Tiny would have thought of something very interesting. But don't misunderstand me... Tiny is not the town clown... he has a serious mission, and knows it.

B. E. Lloyd, writing in San Francisco in the '70s about the local scene tells about the unusual local situation of female prestige and attire. According to Lloyd, the usual situation is reversed in that instead of the whores trying to dress as well as the ladies of high society, the society queens tried desperately, and unsuccessfully, to dress as well as the prominent madams and leading whores. Lloyd also makes specific comment on the atmosphere of the Barbary Coast..."It was a grand theater of crime. The glittering stiletto, the long blade bowie knife, the bottle containing the deadly drug, and the audacious navy revolver, were much used implements in the plays that were enacted..." I am not trying by means of this quotation to show that the area of the Barbary Coast was more violent 75 years ago than it is today, but the methods of extortion and persuasion have probably



ENCHANTED WITH THE DELIGHTFUL PROSPECT OFF THE BAR.

become a little more refined. Whereas prostitution was more or less confined to certain streets and areas in those days, it is now generally dispersed throughout the total extent of the city. All the various types of criminals still ply their trades, but perhaps in a little more subtle manner, with a more intricate protective web of attorneys and other semi-official relationships.

We have all heard the various tales about the bygone writers who drifted in and out of San Francisco and almost invariably they were impressed with the charm of the city, but somehow the great contemporaries have not written about San Francisco as much as we would like... for example, I think it is much to be regretted that an Oakland girl named Gertrude Stein who did some of her most formative and informative reading in the old Mercantile Library left almost no recollections of San Francisco as a city in her writings. She is supposed to have read a lot of 17th and 18th century English literature during a year here, but I have found none of her living contemporaries who recollect her. Unfortunately the records of the library were destroyed in the 1906 fire so we can't see what she was snooping into... I hope, for her own sake, that she read such things as the *Police Gazette*, *The Wasp*, and the silly little *Lark*.

One thing the old time Bohemians had that we certainly don't is the Free Lunch. This was a 19th century American phenomenon that reached some kind of a high water mark in San Francisco. The better saloons, known as the "two bit saloons," served a free lunch from eleven in the morning to two in the afternoon which often included the following: turtle soup, roast pig, sheep tongue, liver, fish balls, salmon, potatoes, tomatoes, cheese, crackers, 'nick nacks,' and 'all accessory relishes.' The "nickel saloon" where any available drink was five cents, also had a free lunch, which, though not as varied as the "two bit" variety, made up in quantity what it lacked in diversion. Many theories have been advanced about the free lunch... argument is certainly available about one thing, however, that it was a good thing, while it lasted.

Although San Francisco's Bohemia is presently overrun with poets, the annual art festival makes it appear as though there is a painter lurking under every rock; generally speaking the protrusion of the world of 'Arts and Letters' into the workaday world is not very great. Three or four blocks from some of the most Bohemian bars in town, the grinding cog wheels of the city's center of finance mesh silently, aside from the occasional screams of a ruined secretary or a discharged purist... so near and yet so far. From the high windows of the Russ Building, the Mills Tower, the Standard Oil and Shell Buildings, you can look down into the sun-warmed squalor, and the fiery passion and the tense emotional struggle in every haphazard design. You will probably never know what was behind that leathery face that looked out at you as you walked down Stockton between Sacramento and Washington... the old face between the geraniums.

No matter how far or long the San Francisco Bohemian may roam, there is almost invariably an eternal sort of return. As you sit in the bars listening to the young men with the newly-grown beards, they are talking of getting back, being back in town, and such things. Though they do not have the price of the next drink in their pockets, or the price of the tube of paint they must purchase before the current painting can be finished, there is a soft flow of talk... running, broken, interrupted, continuous... sounding somewhat like the letter written by William Keith from Dusseldorf in 1870 to B. P. Avery in San Fran-



cisco: "I am going to be a good one [artist] or die in the attempt. But I won't die till I have shown you that you were not wrong in your appreciation of me."

Avery wrote one of the articles in the first issue of the 'Overland Monthly,' a magazine founded by a San Francisco bookseller, A. Roman, in 1868 and edited by Bret Harte... the article was entitled "Art Beginnings on the Pacific"... the chronicling of literary and cultural endeavors is probably the most popular indoor sport in these parts. Five years earlier a history of "early" newspaper activity was published in a Sacramento paper. Prenatal accounts abound.

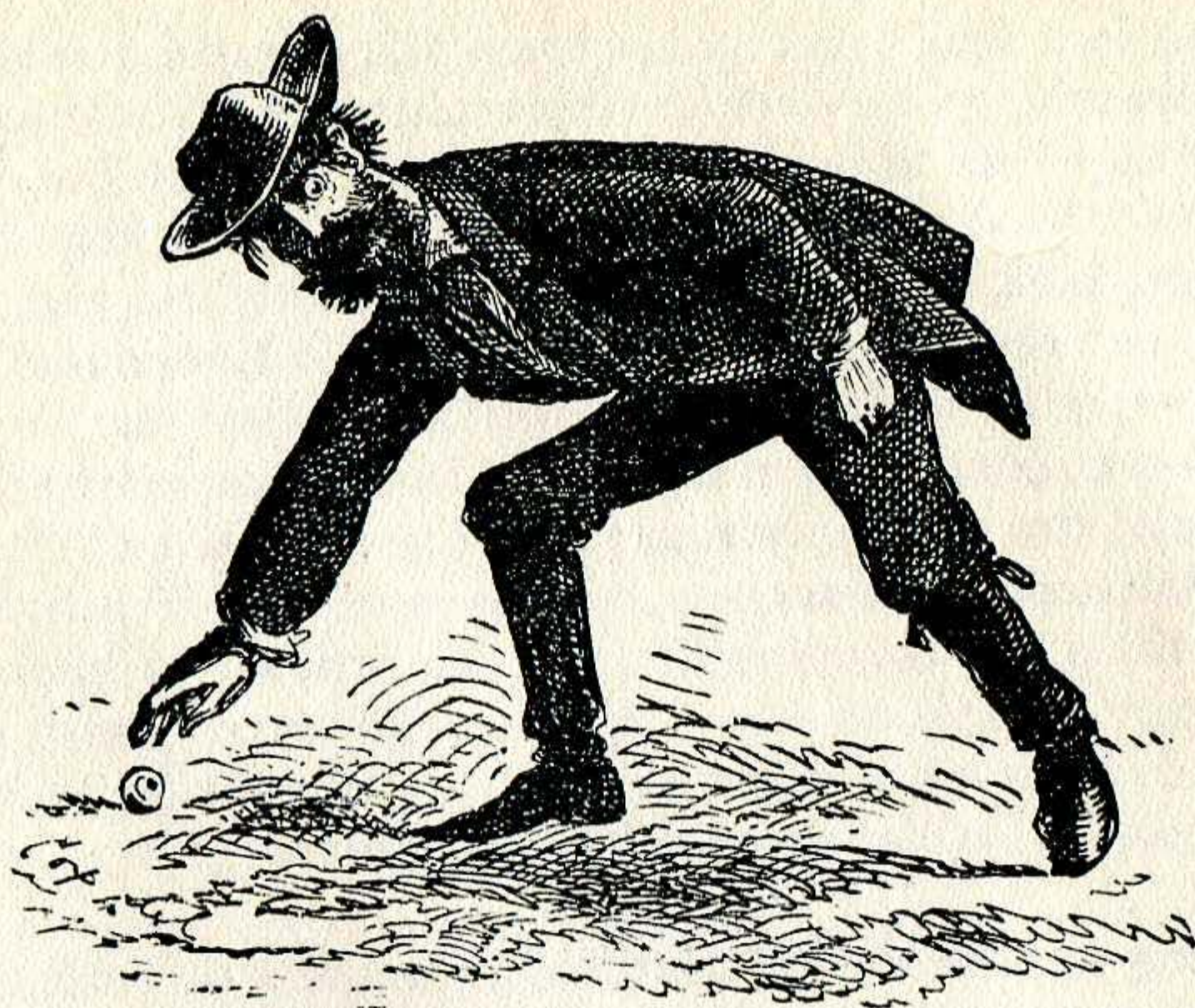
One of the landmarks of San Francisco is the Montgomery Block at 628 Montgomery Street on the corner of Washington at the foot of Columbus Avenue. The "Monkey Block" as it is affectionately called, has a checkered history. It was originally constructed in 1854 by Halleck, and although laughed at when built, it rapidly established itself as a swank office building. As time went by, other buildings went up in the vicinity and the Monkey Block became less desirable and instead of professional offices other types of business were carried on

there. Space does not permit a fair enumeration of the people who have worked and lived within its thick walls. Most of the artists of any account of the last fifty years have lived there or had studios there at one time or another. Huntington had the beginnings of his famous library there at first, before it was moved south. The building has been used for many official and unofficial purposes. It served as a mint, a prison, a wine warehouse, bars have been there, and above all, since most of the rooms on its four floors are fairly small, it has been the gathering place of the artists and Bohemians for at least fifty years. It is the oldest building in downtown San Francisco, and it will be a sad day on Montgomery Street when the age-old threat finally materializes and they actually begin to tear it down. The Porpoise Bookshop was formerly located in Room 239 of this historic structure, and to our knowledge was the only bookstore ever in the building. Since May of 1955, The Porpoise Bookshop has been at 308 Clement Street.

Many buildings on the lower side of Montgomery Street were originally constructed on top of the sunken or sinking hulls of abandoned ships. This happened with some of the buildings on the upper side of the street too but generally speaking it was on the East side of the street, towards the Embarcadero that this happened. Many of the structures on the East side of the 700 block on Montgomery Street have portions of old ship hulls visible in their basements. The trick is to find out which ones and then get yourself admitted. It is a curious sight.

Back in the 1860's the head of the San Francisco Department of Public Health was pleading eloquently (in his annual report) for public urinals. His eloquence went unheeded however, and we are still in need of them. The amount of liquid consumed by San Franciscans in the downtown area in the evenings leads to some rather distasteful practices on the part of some of the less thoughtful citizens (and visitors). Like Paris, however, this would solve the problem for one sex only, and cast a somewhat unchivalrous color on our way of life. But something must be done...as any strayed reveler will tell you.

There has always been a great deal of chatter about the environs. I do not think it justified or worth perpetuating. Suffice it to say that



BILL AFTER HIS GLASS EYE.

the environs exist as a place where the *dull* people go to eat and sleep at night . . . and then scurry back to the city the next morning to make a living . . . the perfect solution to a serious problem. Every large city produces a certain percentage of dullards. San Francisco exports them to Marin, the East Bay, and down the Peninsula . . . if we didn't have this outlet for our middle class we wouldn't have San Francisco . . . certainly not the Bohemian aspects.

It has been said that one sure way to ruin a good restaurant is to bring it to the attention of the general public. With this danger in mind, I must nevertheless recommend a little place called the Caruso Cafe on Green Street below Columbus. It is a small place with a bar that occupies at least half of the space. The meals are cheap, the wine is only fair, but the food is very good. There is a nice reckless atmosphere (at this writing) and for a good dinner in the manner of the old North Beach Italians I strongly recommend it. There was a time when North Beach was full of places where you could get a first class Italian style dinner with wine for well under a dollar. Now the dollar won't buy the dinner and the wine is extra, but the Bohemians get paid more these days for their nefarious work and are still able to eat and drink occasionally.

One appalling fact which has never been fully realized is the large number of Bohemians who work at very ordinary jobs in various parts of the city all day (and almost every day), and at night like moths to a flame, return to their particular den of iniquity hoping that the long-awaited person, idea, or inspiration will come along. As you visit the various bars and restaurants in San Francisco's Bohemian quarter, you should remember this somewhat grim fact... that just as you pass your day in some routine job in Kansas or Indiana or some other god-forsaken part of the world, waiting for the unexpected or the impossible, so do Bohemians the same... a little more frenetically at times, perhaps... a little less restrainedly... more articulate, maybe... but just as unhappy as anyone else, and when the opportunity presents itself, a little more quick to step up and seize Pleasure by the hands... or whatever portion of her anatomy is convenient.

It is interesting to note the influence of geography on such things as menus, wine lists and various customs in a locality. The early settlers in San Francisco were sufficiently varied as to background so that foreign flavor as such was not particularly exotic to a home-grown San Franciscan, but still some early foibles and practices persist. We see "Eastern Oysters" on menus and know full well that the tiny Olympia oysters from up on the Washington coast are better than any oyster that ever grew down east. We pay through the gills for "Kansas City Beef" which was probably fattened in South San Francisco. We pay like fools for Chateau Quelquechose when many of our wines are far better than most of the imported ones... but these are the exceptions. San Francisco is particularly free of so-called foreign flavor. It is true that the souvenir business is built nowadays to a large extent on Chinese curios (made in Japan) but the real essence of the city is certainly not in the gimcracks one finds in the junk stands conducted for tourists and visitors from Stonestown and the Sunset...

The flavor is just elusive enough so that every noisy New Yorker who comes along cannot glibly blab out a slang formula and dismiss the charm of the city with a phrase.

Fortunately, the city defies description and excels in those undefinable qualities which make the hack writer beat his head in anguish and despair. Actually, the city is all things to almost everybody... isn't that enough? Most people from the Midwest and East are so im-



A ONE SIDED OPERATION.

pressed by the politeness (which is only relative) of the cabbies, bus-drivers, waiters, bartenders and those essential people in the world who serve us, that they are unable to form an unbiased picture of the city. They remember it pleasantly ... even nostalgically.

Far be it from me to take the gleam from the glamour but certain legends might as well be dispelled here and now as well as anywhere. For example: Tong Wars ... there hasn't been a first-class tong war in San Francisco in many decades, and what with the present tendencies toward 'labor organizers' and the general movement of Chinese out of and beyond the so-called 'Chinatown' area, it seems quite ridiculous to try to imagine the present crop of soda fountain and marijuana kids getting involved in anything more serious than an occasional bout of juvenile delinquency. Gambling is still quite a big thing in Chinatown, but like other rackets in these United States it is strictly a business. Violence is not business-like because there are too many hungry lawyers waiting to pounce ... bad publicity is bad for business. The Chinatown of the pig-tailed laundry man and the sadistic henchman is gone ... but the polished up and refurbished vices are still going strong. They want customers ... repeat customers ... not victims.

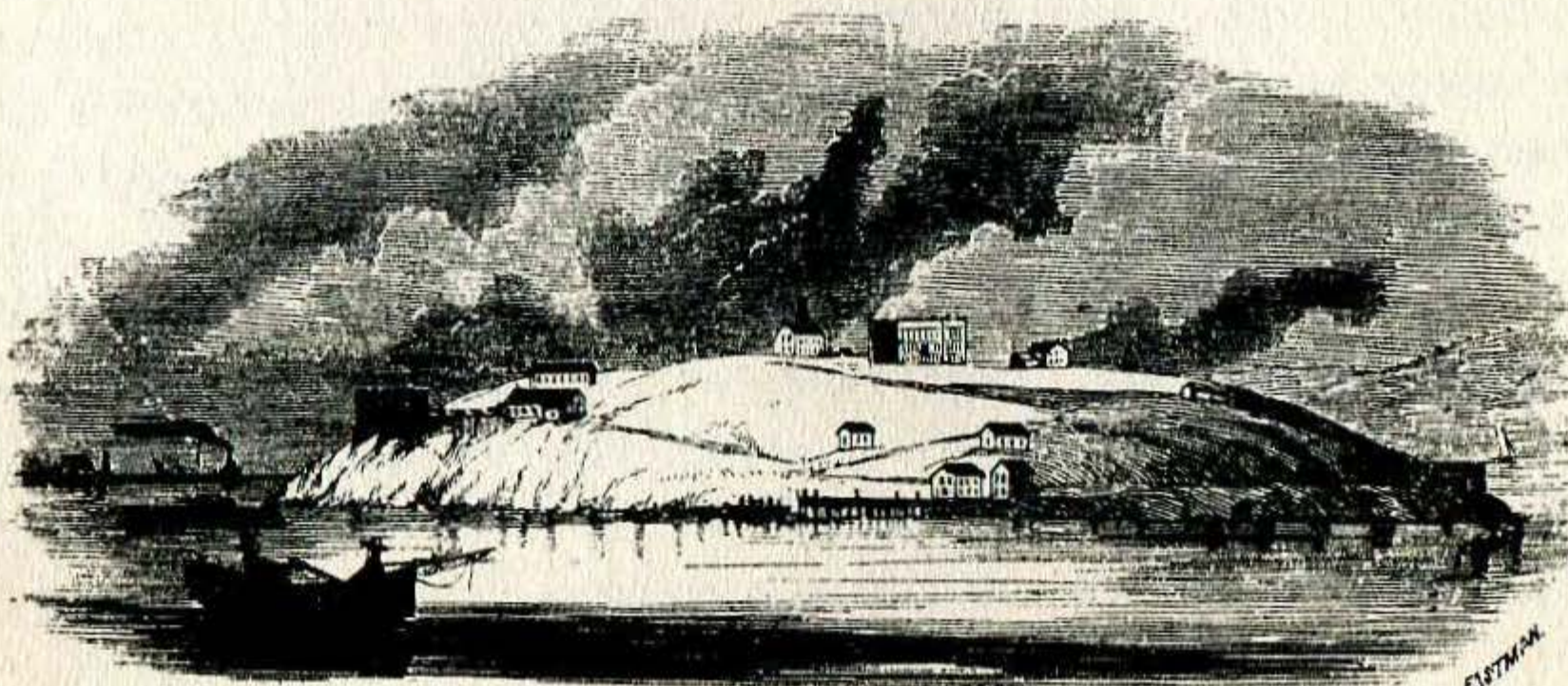


There is also a rumor that if you are young and twenty and get yourself soused in a bar (they are not supposed to serve minors but most minors don't look that young anymore) that you might wake up the next day a hundred miles at sea, with a cruel mate shaking you by the shoulder and shouting profane words into your aching ears...most unlikely. You might wake up in the bull pen of the local bastille but this is because the cops are trying to take care of you. Better you should spend the remainder of the night in jail than get yourself involved in a rolling party or some perverse affairs which you would undoubtedly regret later. Shanghaing, I am forced to state, is no longer common in San Francisco. Nor is it common for pure young things to come to the city and be tempted by despair, drink, or trickery into a house of ill-fame. The houses of ill-fame exist, but I have been told that the workers therein are not young and are not screaming to get out. It takes all kinds of people. It has been said by a local sage that there are more women in the world who wish they were in a house of ill-fame than there are women in the world wishing to be out of them. This ungallant remark is not really of local origin, as the man lives in the city, but he was *born* in Oakland.



THE OCEAN HOUSE.

A lot of mean remarks have been made about the San Francisco police force, locally referred to as 'the finest.' They don't say that they're the 'finest,' but we know they're the finest. There is undoubtedly a certain amount of corruption in the force, and there have been times when I wished that certain policemen were a little more *informed*, but generally speaking I know of no other group of policemen, with the exception perhaps of the ones in London, who are so consistently polite, helpful and tolerant. The city is difficult to police in many ways. There are a lot of very serious things the police force has to do besides go out and quiet down a drunken brawl in the Richmond or Sunset. We have our fair share of bank robberies (more than our share I think) and our portion of the various types of violent criminals who actively endanger the peaceable citizen... the local Irish cop is generally a pretty good guy and he only acts like a fool or a bully when someone a little higher up forces him to.

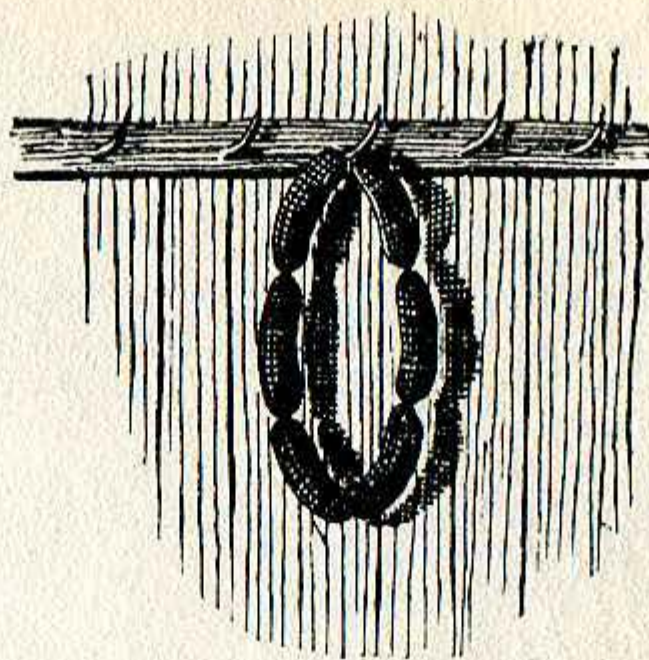


ALCATRACES ISLAND.



NEW WORLD MARKET, CORNER OF COMMERCIAL AND LEIDSDORFF STREETS.

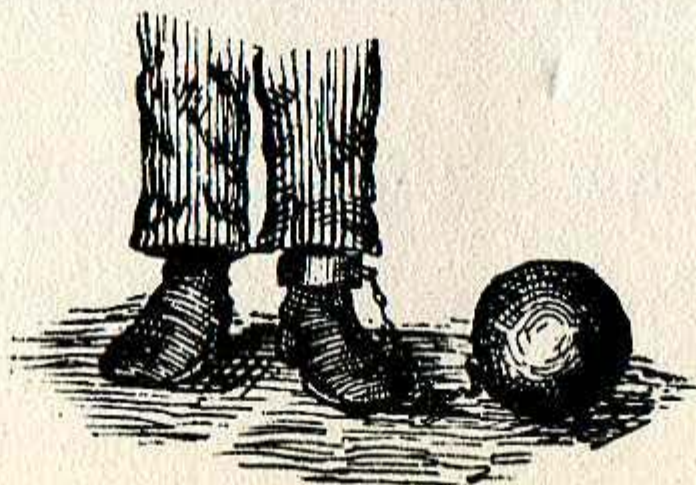
People who visit San Francisco from other parts of the country will not, unless they are persistent, get to sample one of the commodities which we enjoy in a manner that no other city in the West can. I am talking about bread. Bread may be the staff of life according to the old saw, but it's just a heavy lump of lead in your stomach the way the average baker produces it. Here in San Francisco we have a number of fine bakeries. My two favorites are The Ukraine on McAllister and Webster featuring Russian and Jewish specialties, and Larraburu on Third Avenue between Clement and Geary where sourdough French bread and rolls with hard crisp crusts are made that will send you into a tizzy of gastronomic delight. Sounds like a silly thing to become rhapsodic about, but if you have taste buds . . . if you know and can tell the difference you will enjoy the experience. Some restaurants serve Larraburu's bread, but none as far as I know serve bread from The Ukraine.

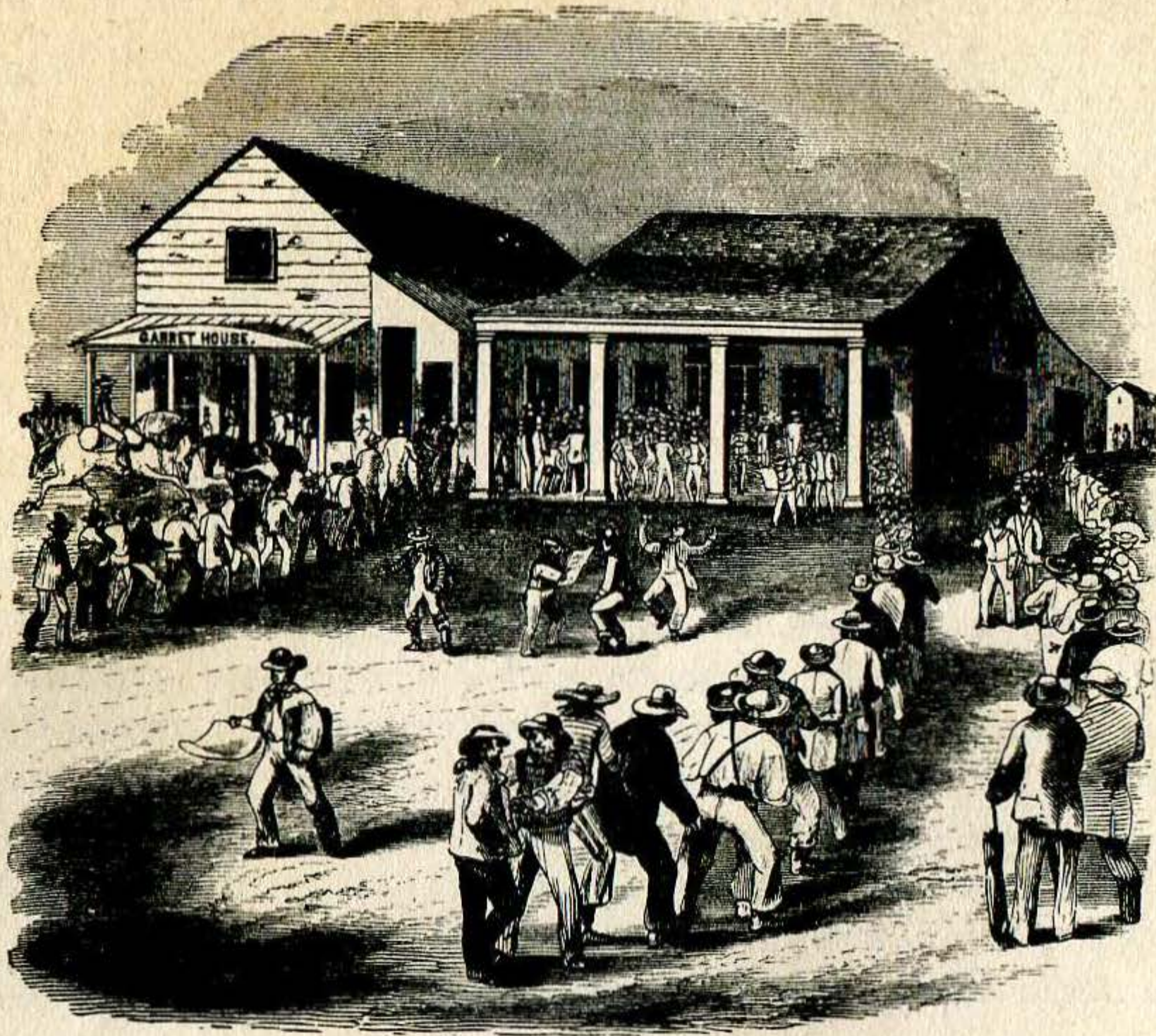


And while I am writing about food there is one subject which is never talked about in all the books about food in San Francisco, Bohemian or otherwise, and that's our magnificent supply of fresh tagliarini and ravioli. The different spaghetti and macaroni are available almost everywhere, but fresh tagliarini and fresh ravioli, made by experts such as we have in San Francisco, are a real treat and available in most of the better restaurants in North Beach. Some of these places make their own, especially if the restaurant is run by a family, but most of them buy supplies fresh daily from the 'factories.'

If you don't enjoy some fine meals in San Francisco the fault will be yours alone.

Any book that attempts to cover so diversified a subject will be guilty of errors of commission and omission. There are a lot of people who consider themselves 'characters' or are considered to be such by other people . . . and their names have not been mentioned in this book. Space simply would not permit inclusion of everyone and so to those dear drunken, amazed, confused and garrulous souls that I have apparently ignored, but actually have not forgotten, I extend my heartfelt, warm, and sincere apologies.





THE POST-OFFICE, CORNER OF PIKE AND CLAY STREETS.

Another book by Henry Evans about San Francisco is called **THE CURIOUS LORE OF SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINA-TOWN**. It is in this same format and also sells for 25c. It may be obtained from your bookseller or directly from the publisher:

The Porpoise Bookshop
308 Clement Street, San Francisco 18, California