Hunting a place to eat

A Manhattan sketch

By Elgin E. Groseclose, '20

EXT to chasing the elusive dollar, or perhaps the latest celebrity, the most persistent occupation of New Yorkers appears to be that of hunting a place to eat. There are of course some million Italians who plod home faithfully every night to their heaping plates of spaghetti, another million or so Jews to whom no food is kosher unless prepared by Mamma with her own hands, and a few odd married men who love their hot biscuits, coffee and bacon prepared over their own gas ranges. Aside from these, everyone in New York eats out, and food, as a subject of conversation, is more important than the tariff, naval disarmament or the tax rate war.

Restaurants are more numerous than cigar stores, and cigar stores are more numerous than street corners. At least that is the impression gathered from the maze of signs everywhere of 'cafes,' 'diners,' 'coffee shops,' 'chop suey,' 'Childs,' 'Henri's,' and other indications of gastronomical haunts. In New York will be found, so one is assured, every viand a lavish world can spread before a wealthy and pampered city. There are all the varied cuts of fresh meat from the beef of Texas and pork of Iowa, not to mention Irish bacon, Prague ham or Austrian salami, and even on occasion reindeer steak, venison and game fowl. There are fish from both fresh and salt water, shad roe and caviare, with all the varieties of clams and oysters our waters afford. There are vegetables from the hot houses of Long Island, grapes from Belgium, Persian melons from California, cherries from Dalmatia, Swedish bread, South American yerba mate, the ingredients for birds nest soup and Indian chutney. The negroes of Harlem may have their West Indian yams, the Italians their native tomatoes and the Greeks their goat's milk cheese. Yet for all that, appetites are jaded and the search for a good restaurant continues more tantalizing than that for the fountain of youth and more indefatigable than that for the Holy Grail.

The pancakes had been a little off color for several mornings. Louise blamed it on the milk, while I thought it was the flour.

"Why not have something different," I suggested, and picked up a copy of The Questing Cook which some gourmand friend had sent us. "Here's something different—a Gallic dish—beignets souffles, or we may try zrazys, a Slavic delicacy, or perhaps frijoles guisados, which is Spanish, so it says." "A brilliant idea," Louise responded, "but the only place to find these dishes is in a restaurant, not an ordinary restaurant but one of those places where strange exotic people gather. Let us eat out for a while."

A BRILLIANT idea it was, brilliantly conceived. But before we were through we came to be somewhat contemptuous of Byrd seeking the South Pole. There is only one South Pole, and he had a compass to guide him, while there are a million restaurants in New York and a million perplexing sign posts. Discarding the forty suggestions given us by forty solicitous friends, we decided to set bravely forth without compass, guide or chart.

The first place we came across was a white tiled front with an enormous plate glass window through which could be seen the whole interior—long rows of immaculate white porcelain topped tables, bevys of waitresses clad in spotless green and white, and white tiled walls everywhere. While not exactly exotic or inviting, it did look sanitary, and from the crowds within, it seemed that the food must be good. We were just about to enter when a chef in irrepresible white took a place in the window and began to flop pancakes in the air. Then we noticed the sign—Children's Restaurant—The Nation's Host from Coast to Coast.

We had both enjoyed the hospitality of Mr Childs in various parts of the continent, and while we had no objection to his delicious pancakes (or wheat cakes as they are called here), we had never seen a zrazy on the menu, and today we wanted a zrazy.

It was not far before we espied a huge brick fireplace in the window, on which were laid out rows of steaming spiced hams. There was a pleasant air of a lumberman's camp about it, and we might find here a delicious rahmtunke, which I remembered was made of venison. We entered.

"Give us a couple of rahmtunke," I ordered with the most approved hauteur. An individual resembling a bartender, who stood behind the counter, gave me a ferocious glare.

"See here," he growled, "dis place is dry, strictly dry. Get me."

I saw we had made a mistake, and apologizing profusely we withdrew.

We gave only a fleeting glance at several cafeterias with steaming counters, avoided numerous inns, likewise various and sundry grills and taverns. It was certain there would be no rahmtunke there. We were about to return to our gas range defeated for the day when we caught sight of an Automat.

An Automat is a fearful and wonderful thing to behold. A product of our mechanical age, in which one may dine sumptuously—so we had heard—with only a handful of nickles. You drop a nickel into a slot and in a trice it dissolves into a cup of coffee or freezes into an ice cream cone. Whether it would turn into a beignet souffle or even a Danish applecake we were not sure. Peering through the innumerable tiny windows we failed to discover anything that faintly resembled our conception of a beignet souffle, and finally dropped some coins in the slot nearest us. In a twinkling, and before we could run away from them, there slipped out before us, steaming from their imprisonment and twinkling, and before we could run away, three round winsome pancakes.

That night we held a council of war, to revise our plan of attack.

"The only way really to find a place to eat," said Louise, "is to go to the theater, pick out the most interesting person we can find, and trail him to his lair."

After some consultation, during which it was decided that a dinner jacket would
serve as well as a dress suit, and that the correct thing to accompany a dinner jacket is a black tie, a soft felt hat and a certain air of nonchalance, our plans were laid.

During the interval of a rather naughty play (which we had of course purposely chosen, as being suited to the necessities of finding the object of our search) we came across the individual himself. He was a real New Yorker, that was evident. Who can describe a true New Yorker? He may resemble anything in appearance from an Italian mafia to a lanky Texan, but in his carriage there is always a savoir faire, and in his eye a look which can survey the entire globe from the top of a forty story building. When the curtain descended, we followed him to the street where he called a cab. Calling another, I whispered to the driver to follow.

Our two cabs crossed over to Fifth Avenue, then up to Fifty-eighth Street, where the one ahead turned off and drew up at a plain front entrance at which stood a doorman as big and important as Emil Jannings in The Last Laugh. Following discreetly behind, we halted, and when the big blue overcoat had pompously opened the door, we descended.

After being ushered through a long corridor, dimly illumined by rush lights of antique bronze, we entered a huge space, for all the world like a Spanish patio lighted with the mellow rays of an afternoon sun. The roof, enormously high, was glazed in blue to resemble the sky, and surrounding the whole were balconies up which vines clambered, and over the balustrades of which brilliantly colored shawls were carelessly draped—as though laid aside by a sendrita while she danced a movement of the fandango. The pillars supporting the balconies were of marble, each column of a different variety—the delicate carnelian of the Hebrews, the yellow and brown of Algeria, the reddish mottled Siena of Tuscany, the dull green of Uruguay, and the black of Vermont. The floor of this vast space was of broad flagstones of irregular pattern, and the space was filled with tables of mission style. The chairs were of dull oak, upholstered in Spanish leather. Everywhere were strikingly gowned women and men in formal black—a typical New York after theater crowd.

"How exotic," whispered Louise, as we seated ourselves and a waiter bowed obsequiously over us, "it lacks only the soft music of guitars."

There was no doubt about it. Here indeed should we find frijoles guisados. I drew the menu toward me. It looked familiar. A neat folded card, ornamented in borders of green. I glanced at it. And then the awful realization came over me of the length to which these modern chain store restaurants will go to draw high and low into their mesh.

"Wheat cakes and maple syrup—25c" was the item my eye fell upon.

And then the heading,

"... The Nation's Host from Coast to Coast."

As time passed we gathered experience and wisdom regarding restaurant life in New York and learned the whereabouts of a number of interesting places. An old A. R. A. friend who had spent three adventurous years feeding the starving of Crimea told us of the Russian Bear down on Second Avenue. Here a balalaika orchestra plays repeatedly the Volga Boat Song, and for a moderate price one may obtain a very interesting meal starting out with bortsch soup—an inimitable Russian concoction made of cabbages, sour milk and various other trimmings—caviare, both red and black, and an entree of delicious lamb. On the walls are coarsely executed murals which in spite of their crudity are instinct with the spirit of New Russia. There are no New Yorkers here—just jaded Russian generals, shopkeepers from the precincts of Manhattan bridge, and a lively touch of art students and young writers from the neighboring villages.

Further uptown, but still below Twenty-third street, are a number of Armenian restaurants, which are not Armenian in cuisine, but Turkish, where may be had the delicious piles of snowy rice—pilaf—which is the national dish of the nations lying around the southern side of the Black Sea—yoghurt, the famous Bulgarian buttermilk, solidified cream and pastries of pounded almond and honey.

There are others of which we learned, cozy withdrawn places frequented by only a few, where frijoles and beignets souffles may always be found, and where on occasions the chef even surprises his clientele with a newer and stranger delicacy. But these places we may not name aloud. To a few, a select few, who ask us discreetly, we will tell.

### The builders

**By Edward Everett Dale, '11**

**This is the song of the builders**

Who toil with might and main.
Building, ever building
With muscle and heart and brain,
Structures of brick and mortar,
Structures of steel and wood.
They labor on from the early dawn
That their work may be strong and good.

They build not only structures
But things not made with hands.
Firm on a rock to stand each shock
And not on the shifting sands.
Things of the heart and spirit
Things of the mind and soul
Character high as the arching sky
These are the builders' goal.

This is the song of the builders
Who toil with might and main
Building, ever building
With muscle and heart and brain
Build with us Master Architect
Or else we shall build in vain.