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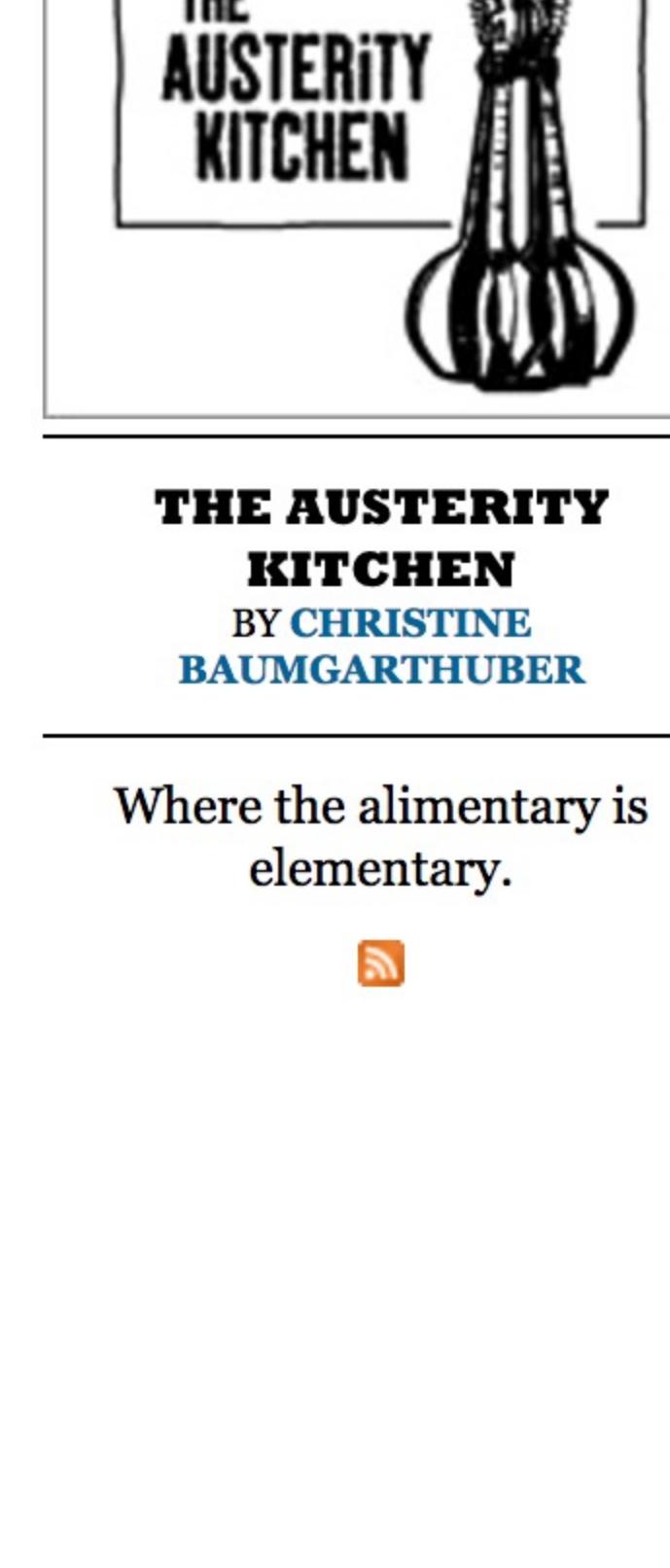
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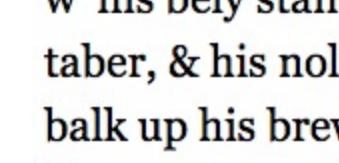
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ABOUT



Where the alimentary is
elementary.



"What good can the great gloton do
w' his bely standing a strote, like a
taber, & his noll toty with drink, but
balk up his brewes in ye middes of
his matters, or ly down and slepe
like a swine. And who douthet but
ye the body delicately fed, maketh,
as ye rumour saith, an unchast
bed." — Sir Thomas More

Emperor Vitellius could not
restrain himself from devouring the people...
offerings.

"There Squire went on to lament
the deplorable decay of the people and
amusements which were once
prevailed at this season among the
lower orders, and countenanced by the
higher: when the old halls of
castles and manor-houses were
thrown open at daylight; when the
tables were covered with brawn,
and beef, and hamming ale; when
the harp and the carol resounded
all day long, and when rich and
poor alike welcome to enter
and make merry." — Washington
Irving, *Old Christmas* (ca. 1819)

"The farmer is not a man: he is the
plow of the one who eats the
bread." — Georges Bataille, *Theory
of Religion* (1973)

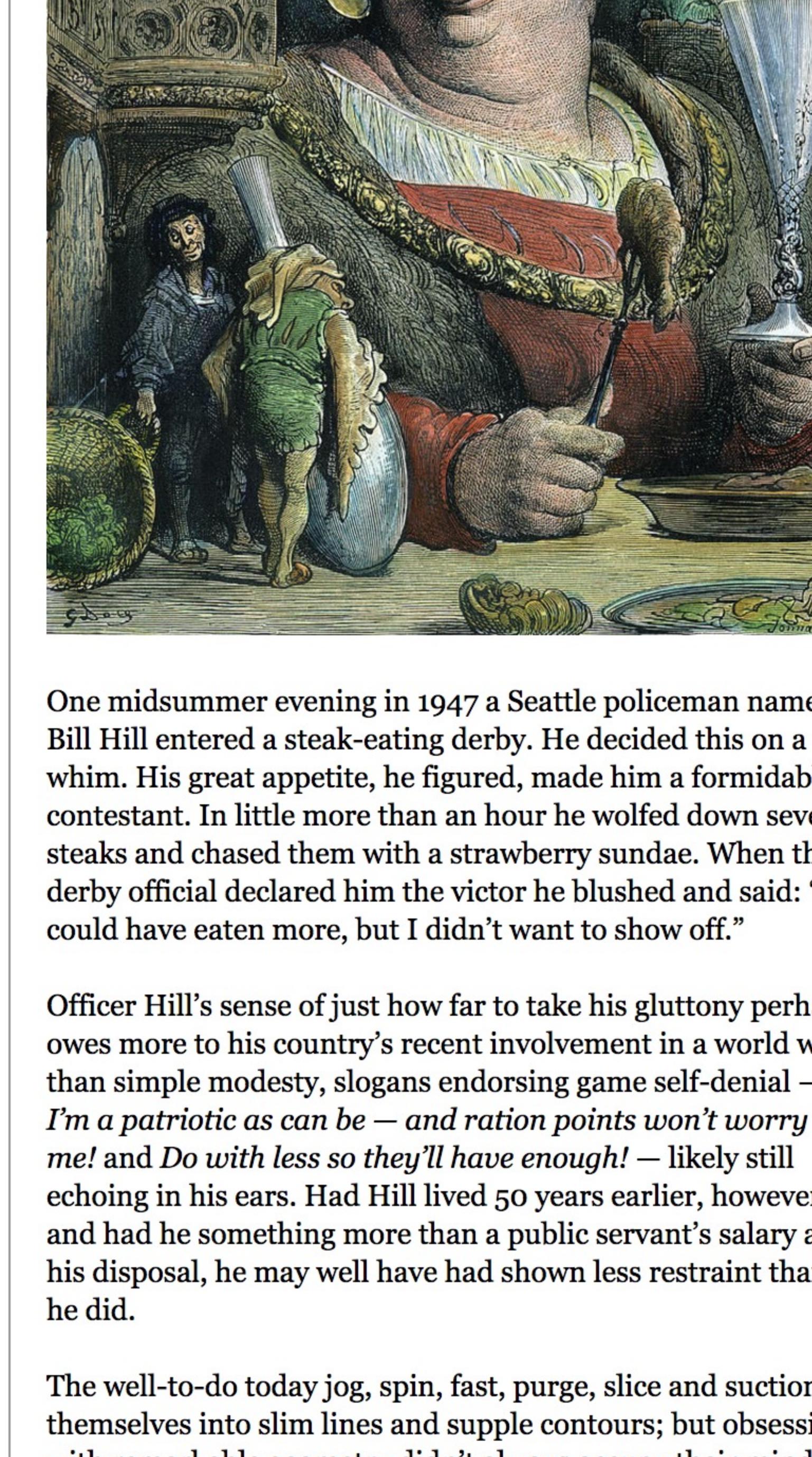
Christine Baumgartner
Dinner with Caligula
A Stomach Image
Steaming Excrement

DESIGNED BY IMP KERR BUILT BY KRATE

Serving the Rich

By CHRISTINE BAUMGARTNER

*The meek shall inherit the earth — if the mighty don't
consume it first*



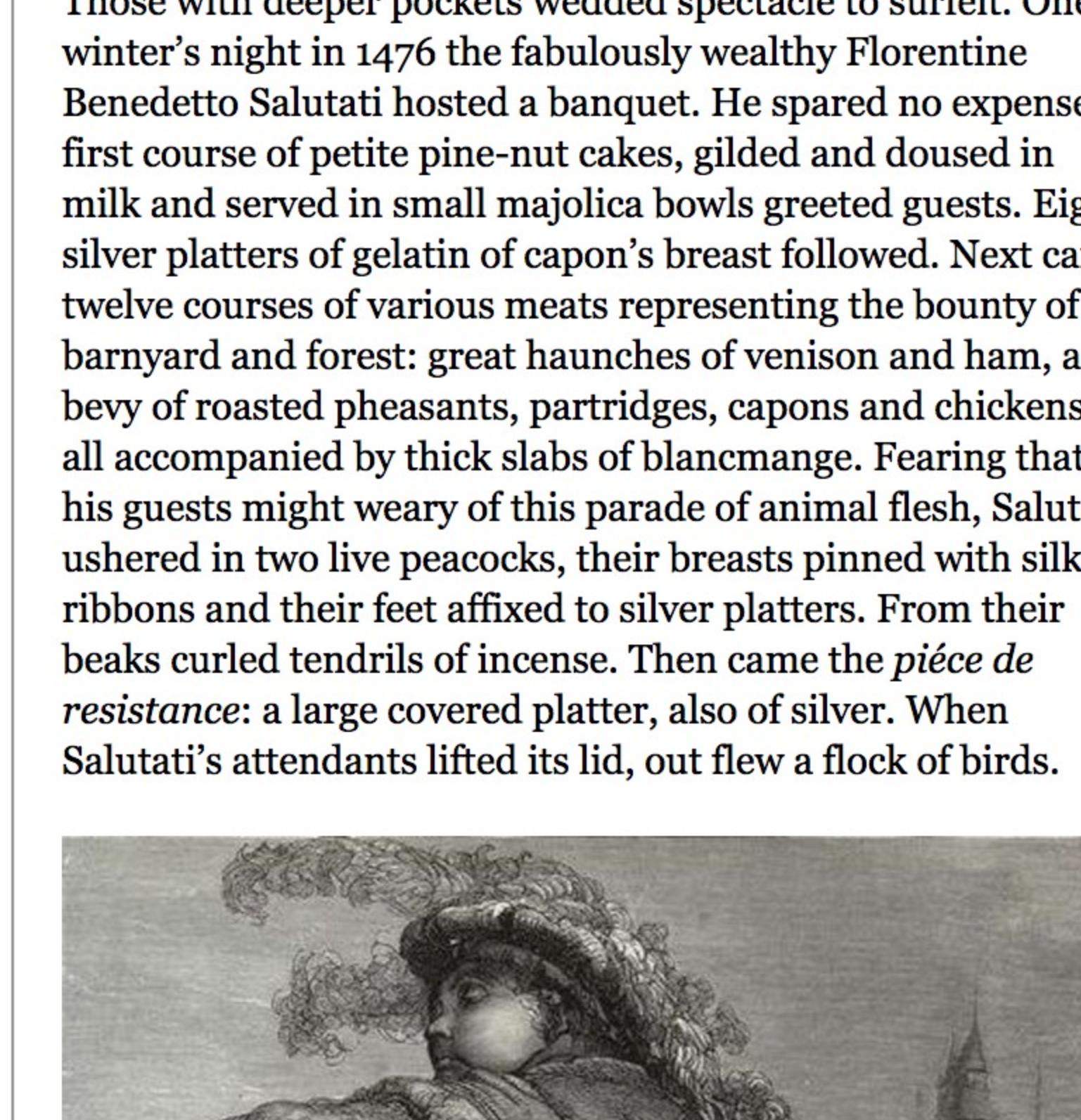
January 22, 2013

Illustrations from *La Vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* (ca. 1873)

One midsummer evening in 1947 a Seattle policeman named Bill Hill entered a steak-eating derby. He decided this on a whim. His great appetite, he figured, made him a formidable contestant. In little more than an hour he wolfed down seven steaks and chased them with a strawberry sundae. When the derby official declared him the victor he blushed and said: "I could have eaten more, but I didn't want to show off."

Officer Hill's sense of just how far to take his gluttony perhaps owes more to his country's recent involvement in a world war than simple modesty, slogans endorsing game self-denial — *I'm a patriotic as can be — and ration points won't worry me!* and *Do with less so they'll have enough!* — likely still echoing in his ears. Had Hill lived 50 years earlier, however, and had he something more than a public servant's salary at his disposal, he may well have had shown less restraint than he did.

The well-to-do today jog, spin, fast, purge, slice and suction themselves into slim lines and supple contours; but obsession with remarkable geometry didn't always occupy their minds. To the voice that pesters people of modest means when reaching for a second slice of cake or the last lamb chop the well-to-do of yesteryear paid little attention. Conscience seldom stayed the bejeweled, fork-clutching hand. Captains of industry, men of business, women of fortunes, ladies of renown, magnates, prelates, the great and the good — when they dined they brought appetites as vast as their wealth; and like that wealth, those appetites never seemed diminished.



That the rich ate in grand style and quantities comes as no surprise. History tells of Roman emperors who gorged from midday to midnight on the tongues of song birds and the bladders of fish and the soft, pink teats of heifers. Later kings and queens proved as voracious as their imperial forbears, as did prosperous merchants, burghers and other commoners. Anyone who had money made a show of it at table. A wealthy late 14th-century Englishman's ordinary meal consisted of three courses, the first featuring seven dishes, the second five and the third six. On festive occasions the number of dishes increased to nine, eleven and twelve, making for some thirty to forty plates of food in all. And this for a man of middling fortune!

Those with deeper pockets wedged spectacle to surfeit. One winter's night in 1476 the fabulously wealthy Florentine Benedetto Salutati hosted a banquet. He spared no expense. A first course of petite pine-nut cakes, gilded and doused in milk and served in small majolica bowls greeted guests. Eight silver platters of gelatin of capon's breast followed. Next came twelve courses of various meats representing the bounty of barnyard and forest: great haunches of venison and ham, a bevy of roasted pheasants, partridges, capons and chickens, all accompanied by thick slabs of blancmange. Fearing that his guests might weary of this parade of animal flesh, Salutati ushered in two live peacocks, their breasts pinned with silk ribbons and their feet affixed to silver platters. From their beaks curled tendrils of incense. Then came the *pièce de résistance*: a large covered platter, also of silver. When Salutati's attendants lifted its lid, out flew a flock of birds.

For all their inventive excess, the regal feasts of prosperous commoners could not match those of true royalty. England's Henry VIII, for example, boasted an appetite as insatiable as it was insatiable. His favorite dishes he ordered to be brought to him, even when he journeyed abroad. Before visiting France in 1534, he dispatched a communiqué across the Channel. "It is the king's special commandment," it read, that all of the artichokes "be kept for him."

Other monarchs had their gustatory quirks. Soup France's Louis XIV slurped to the point of chronic diarrhea, and gluttony overtook him at his wedding feast to such a degree that he ate himself impotent (much to his bride's chagrin no doubt). Even the Revolution did little to discomfit the royal belly. So ravenous was the restored king Louis XVIII that attendants had to supply him with pork cutlets between meals.

The distaff side matched their male counterparts bite for bite. Catherine de Medici, the Italian-born wife of France's King Henry II, regularly sickened herself on roast chicken and heaps of *cibrèo*, a thick Florentine ragout of rooster gizzard, liver, testicles and comb mixed with beans and egg yolks and served on toast. Britain's Queen Victoria too suffered unremitting peckishness. When Lord Melbourne, one of her ministers, advised her to eat only when she was hungry, she replied, "I am always hungry."

Subjects expected their sovereigns to be hungry. Power rested on conspicuous excess. Abstemiousness occasioned distrust. In 888, Guido, Duke of Spoleto, a contender for the throne of the Frankish kingdom, found his bid derailed by his small appetite. Quipped the archbishop of Metz, one of Guido's critics: "No one who is content with a modest meal can reign over us."

Keen to emulate their antecedents, new money ate as voraciously as old. This was no more true than in nineteenth-century United States, where it seemed anyone who struck gold spent it on lavish refraction. The American self-made millionaire, James Buchanan Brady, better known as "Diamond Jim," exemplified Gilded Age excess, breakfasting daily on beefsteak, chops, eggs, pancakes, fried potatoes, hominy, cornbread, muffins and a beaker of milk. Mid-mornings he snacked on oysters and clams. For lunch came more shelfish accompanied by two or three deviled crabs, a pair of broiled lobsters, a joint of beef, a salad and several "fruit set to round." he would polish off a box of chocolates, "the food set to round," he would polish off a box of chocolates.

When meals didn't "set better," they set decidedly worse. About the time that Diamond Jim was inhaling crustaceans by the dozen, a certain Mr. Rodger gorged himself to such a miserable extent that at meal's end he committed suicide.

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