

THE SOCIAL REGISTER

BY GERALD HOLLAND

THE Social Register was founded in 1887 by Louis Keller, a gay dog. Because of his vast acquaintance, so the official legend goes, he responded to the suggestions of friends that he tabulate the prominent families of New York. Two years before he had helped to launch the gossip magazine, *Town Topics*. He produced the first Register as a booklet of 100 pages containing a few hundred names. There was an appendix devoted to the Patriarch and Assembly balls, a list of the best clubs, and another of the box-holders at the Metropolitan Opera House.

The idea took hold at once. Society was charmed, and the necessity for an annual edition was immediately evident. Keller was nothing loath. He found his tabulations absorbing, and his list grew steadily through marriages, though it was occasionally depleted by unfortunate alliances. He checked and cross-checked for bad blood, ever jealous of his rigid standards. He amused himself by compiling the vital statistics of Society and presented his findings, from time to time, for the edification of the masses.

Soon he undertook to spread the idea to Boston, Philadelphia and Washington. On every hand it was proclaimed a wow. Keller began to perceive that he had something. Incorporated as the Social Register Association, the business went forging ahead. Today there are separate editions of the Register for Washington, Baltimore, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Pitts-

burgh, San Francisco and Buffalo. Philadelphia shares its book with Wilmington, and Cleveland is joined to Cincinnati and Dayton. Until 1928 there were editions for Providence, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Detroit, Richmond, Savannah, Charleston and Atlanta, but they did not pay.

At the beginning, Keller did not foresee this bustling business, refined yet able to pay a fat income tax. So far as it was concerned he always displayed a certain contempt for money. He refused steadfastly many handsome advertising propositions—some proffered, no doubt, in the hope that their donors might be admitted to the sacred text. The Register, he decided, was to be no mere mug-book.

Keller was the son of one Charles M. Keller, a patent lawyer of French birth, and of Héloïse Chazournes, a native New Yorker. He began his happy career at 128 Madison avenue in 1857. His father was possessed of more than modest means—enough to permit the boy to move in the better circles. And move he did with consummate grace until his end in 1922.

But he was no idler. When the elder Keller left him a small fortune, he surveyed the field of industry for some genteel undertaking that would look well with his morning coat. He decided to make guns. But that was not quite it. After a brief fling, he determined, since he had inherited some property in New Jersey, to have a go at dairy farming. Now he was getting warm.

He gradually extended his holdings, and when, in the 90's, the British game of golf seized the attention of a fickle Society he found himself in a strategic position. At once alive to his opportunity, he hurriedly mobilized associates from the topmost stratum and with all possible haste ironed his meadows into a golf course. He threw up a clubhouse and designated the estate the Baltusrol Golf Club—one of the first in America. Here again—coming after *Town Topics* and the Register—was a stroke of genius. Society was enchanted. Bankers left their Wall Street counting rooms to wheeze over the links while Tenth avenue hooted at this new decadence of the classes.

Solidly entrenched socially by now, Louis Keller soon emerged as one of the town's first hosts. He gave pretty dances and royal dinners and his French blood imparted to each a majestic flourish. He won a permanent place on the toniest invitation lists. His business interests widened for all his frivolity, and presently he was definitely rid of financial worries. Yet he was careless of money and fled his earthly shackles with a mere \$300,000 or so.

But his affection for the Social Register never wavered. Before he died at his home in Cranton he stipulated that Bertha Eastmond, a trusted associate, be made its secretary for life, and that she receive one-tenth of the annual profits. He expired committing his treasure to her tender care and to that of his nephew, the impeccable Charles Keller Beekman. In his will he wrote, shrewdly, that they were never to surrender the charge "unless and until a flattering offer is obtained from persons who will conduct it upon the same lines, and who can be relied upon to maintain the standards which I have established."

II

The memory of Louis Keller has not been betrayed. To the State the Social Register Association may be just one more corporation, but to those who direct its affairs it is a sacred college. August, aloof and with a kingly pride it goes its way. It beams upon the righteous; it shudders for the indiscreet. It has little to say for public consumption, and when it does speak a chaste release to the press is handed down with the solemnity and finality of a papal bull. These rare statements report the marriages and deaths among the elect, or perhaps Society's boredom with Continental travel and a compensatory addiction to the South Seas.

But despite its lofty mien the Social Register is really a very democratic book. Measured by Mrs. Astor's standards, the 27,000 names recognized among New York's 7,000,000 constitute a staggering minority. Ward McAllister, that fragile flower, no doubt spins in his tomb when he thinks of them. Minton's List, an informal predecessor of the Register, was scarcely more generous than McAllister with his 400. And Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, working from her grandmother's visiting list, once pared the really important families of New York down to the Bards, Barclays, Bronsons, Buchanans, Delafields, Duers, Fishes, Emmetts, Glovers, Hoffmanns, Jays, Kings, Lynches, McVickers, Mortons, Renwicks, Rutherfords, Schuylers, Stuyvesants, and Van Rensselaers.

Still, if the Social Register is not a directory of New York's really and truly first families, it doubtless does present a reasonably accurate roster of those who are commonly invited about. Current Society, obviously, is not that of the Astors and Whitneys of 1890. The pompous din-

ners and glittering balls of their era are as dead as Jesse James.

The Better People of today are selected by the Social Register's Advisory Committee, which includes Miss Eastmond and Mr. Beekman; Morton Bogue, Mr. Beekman's law partner; Ralph Wolcott, attorney for the Keller estate, and Mrs. Townsend Ashmore. Although the personal approval of any one of these is usually sufficient for admission, it is Miss Eastmond who really runs the show. She is the high priestess of the holy book, though Mr. Beekman usually has his word and Mrs. Ashmore is accorded deference on account of her exhaustive knowledge of the older New York families.

Of course, the committee sits only on important cases. It does not bother with the small fry in the sticks. The decisions then, save perhaps in cases of national scandal, are left to local correspondents—in Boston to Mrs. John Attridge; in Washington to Mrs. Effingham Towne; in Baltimore to Miss Nannie Poor; in Chicago to Miss Florence Rice; and in San Francisco to Mrs. Jacques Henricki.

The Register relies upon these provincial ladies to check the proofs each year for local marriages and deaths. Thus they are persons of consequence in their home towns. Ambitious mothers fawn upon them, and they can write their own ticket to any party. The Register is not very strict outside New York. In fact, it's rather on the lookout for plausible names.

Curiously enough, it finds the small-townners frequently indifferent. When it went into St. Paul, since dropped, it listed 1000 names, sent a book and a bill for \$5 to each, and waited for the money to roll in. One hundred and fifty books were sold. Many kept the books and sent no money.

While the best people have always

frowned on brewing, the Social Register admits every last one of the Busches in St. Louis. In New York, however, not a Ruppert or an Ehret rates a line. Yet the Rupperts antedate the Busches in America and have almost as much money.

Detroit, also given up as a bad job, had a local competitor, the Social Secretary. When the Register got up its list, Miss Sarah Burnham, of the Secretary, sniffed and said: "I do not consider that the Social Register uses very good discretion." But the final blow in that town was the heresy of Mrs. William A. McGraw, high in society. She exclaimed:

Why, it's perfect nonsense! One person is every bit as good as another. Anyway, I spend half my time now throwing invitations into the wastebasket.

Nevertheless, the Social Register still finds business good. It serves its subscribers with an annual edition appearing in November, and a Summer edition published in June. It maintains the accuracy of these with Dilatory Domiciles, two supplements appearing in December and January. In addition, it urges the purchase, as an "essential adjunct", of the Locator, an index of all the names in all the Registers—a total of almost 100,000.

It sells the Register for \$7 and throws in the Locator for \$2 more. Any two cities, with the Locator, go for \$15. Send in \$50 and you get the works.

Anyone may buy a copy. Newspapers are excellent customers and smart shops find the Register a mailing list of incalculable value.

III

In its selections and ejections it is the most inconsistent oracle of all time. It reverses itself constantly and complacently. Money alone will not get one in, nor will the

sudden loss of it put one out. There is a strong prejudice against the stage, yet exceptions have been made. The breath of scandal is nearly always fatal, but there is a case of Register people going to jail without loss of caste. This much is fairly certain: one may not marry chambermaids, nurses, chorus girls, prizefighters, song writers, truck drivers, policemen or subway guards. One of the elect must not become involved in an unsavory divorce suit; if he (or she) does so the Register will pitch him (or her) out, with no questions asked. But sin quietly, and the Register will not be unkind.

Jews have been heard to complain of discrimination, but this is probably mere complaining. To be sure there are no Warburgs listed, but there is certainly an Otto Kahn. The younger Kahn, Roger Wolfe, remained in good standing throughout his career with a night club orchestra, but he was released when he married Hannah Williams, a musical comedy actress.

Arthur Brisbane has as nice a line as any Vanderbilt. So has Maury Paul, the Cholly Knickerbocker of the New York *American*. But their boss, William Randolph Hearst, for all his pelf and penthouses, is ignored. The Pulitzers, however, are in. And William Randolph Hearst, Jr., is listed in San Francisco.

Patrick Cardinal Hayes is admitted and so is his brother of the mitre, Bishop William T. Manning, the sky high Episcopalian. But there is no Harry Emerson Fosdick on the list, and no John Haynes Holmes, and no S. Parkes Cadman.

Franklin D. Roosevelt is listed, as is his right by blood, but the governorship could not do as much for Al Smith. They have to carry a President, though—even a Harding, a Coolidge or a Hoover. Jimmy Walker couldn't make the grade nor

could New York's town dandy, Grover Whalen, though he canters through Central Park with the grace of a lord.

Frequently a gentleman will be listed and his brother omitted. So one finds Ralph Beaver Strassburger in and Perry Beaver Strassburger out, Bernard Baruch in and Sailing Baruch out. Harry Sinclair was dropped like a hot chestnut after the oil scandals.

The disfavor accorded the stage has kept the Barrymores out, and Hope Williams lost her place when she left Park avenue for Broadway. Eleanor Hutton, daughter of the broker and breadline proprietor, was apparently ousted for eloping, over parental objections, with Preston Sturges, a playwright. But Ruth Draper is in and Mrs. August Belmont, the former Eleanor Robson of the stage, has managed to stick.

As in her case, one may marry into the Social Register. The committee scrutinizes the aspirant and if he has no glaring flaws, such as a horse-car driver one generation back, it may admit him. Such was the good fortune of Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh.

In almost all cases the Register gives offenders against its code a year's grace. If a young lady of rank and fortune should lose her heart to the cop on the beat, it will note the romance in this fashion:

PENNYFEATHER, Miss Eloise *m.* at Greenwich O'Reilly, Dominick

Then it will throw out the pair of them for their nonsense. This was the experience of Miss Polly Lauder when she married Mr. Tunney, the boxing gentleman.

But sometimes the offense is too flagrant for any temporizing. Miss Ellin Mackay, the Postal Telegraph heiress, was dropped instantly on her marriage, and her husband, Irving Berlin, one time a

singing waiter, received not a nod. Like Lucifer, Mr. Berlin has leading citizens for company. Charley Schwab isn't in either.

When William W. Willock, son of the steel millionaire, married Adelaide Ingebretsen, a chambermaid, in 1929, the Register carried the bride for a year on a separate line. It extended the same courtesy to Alice Jones, the octoroon who married Leonard Kip Rhinelander in 1925. On the latter occasion, Mrs. James E. Stillman, previously ousted during her divorce suit, remarked crisply:

"My, it's getting to be just like the telephone directory!"

Theoretically, anyone may apply for admission. The ritual demands, however, that the approbation of several families already listed be first obtained. The name is then referred to the Advisory Committee along with the following information:

Mr. ....	.....
Mrs. ....	.....
Maiden name .....	.....
Winter address .....	.....
Address next Summer .....	.....
Name of country house .....	.....
Winter phone .....	.....
Summer phone .....	.....
Name and class of yacht .....	.....
Club membership .....	.....
College.....Year of graduation.....	.....
Adults .....	.....
Juniors .....	.....

Obviously, the Social Register is not to be dazzled by a mere two-car family.

Practically, any name unsung by scandal and untarnished by a recent condition of servitude, if it be supported by a fair list of club memberships, will go over. This is especially true in the provinces.

The listing system is quite intricate. For instance, Mr. Beekman, of the staff, is carried in this way:

BECKMAN, Charles Keller, UN. UV. K.
Sa. Ny. Dt. bg. Ss. Lm. Snc. Cl '89.

These mysterious letters mean that Mr. Beekman has paid up his dues at the Union, University, Knickerbocker, St. Anthony, New York Yacht, Downtown, Baltusrol Golf and South Side Sportsmen's Clubs, and that he is a member of the Colonial Lords of the Manor and of the St. Nicholas Society and a Columbia graduate of '89. To such data are appended telephone numbers and town and country addresses—all useful for reference, so that hostesses may comb their invitation lists for impurities and tabloid headline writers may say unerringly:

SOCIAL REGISTERITE DIES IN
LEAP

IV

In New York the Social Register Association renders still another service. Every two years it undertakes to determine the exact social centre of the city—the point, that is, about which Society is most heavily concentrated. The sainted Keller was accustomed to write signed articles in the Sunday supplements about this ebb and flow of blue blood. He even made bold to hazard where future social centres would lie, and was, incidentally, pretty far off.

In 1820, the centre was at Bowling Green. In forty years, it had moved up Broadway to Bond and Lafayette streets. Twenty years later it was at Twentyninth street and Fifth avenue and from there it crept slowly up Fifth avenue. In 1930, it was surprised in the areaway of the John Chandler Moores' town house on the upper East Side. Now it is on Madison avenue in the seventies.

The centre is determined by means of a strip of wood called the "plank of ele-

gance". With profound ceremony, it is divided on one side into the streets of the city and marked off on the other into the avenues. Dainty cards with names of Register people are pinned to their addresses. Then by a highly involved mathematical formula, hardly of earthly inspiration, the centre is calculated to the fineness of a pin point. The scholars are most painstaking.

This is a disinterested public service. There is no fee, and no profit accrues to the Register unless one counts several yards of space in the *New York Times* and other of the local journals.

But the Register flourishes. There was an investor who offered \$600,000 for it in 1928.

It has always been jealous of its virtual monopoly, and did not hesitate to take to the field to rout a Jersey upstart who tried to muscle in a few years back. It does, perforce, suffer a number of competitors but these enemies are outclassed. The biggest of them skipped its 1931 edition.

In the eagerness of the press to oblige, the Register escapes the heavy toll of advertising that is the cross of most businesses. But then its editors do not like to think of their service as a business. The sizable annual profit they regard much in the manner, say, that Billy Sunday looks upon the voluntary offerings of the brethren—as a mere incident in the work of the Lord.

PAGES FROM THE BOOK OF BEER

BY BOB BROWN

BEEER in Western Europe was first brewed in the home, as it is in America today. Brewing was not organized into an industry until the great year 800 A.D., when, for private profit and public convenience, a brewery was established at Föhring near Munich. This brewery was the first on record. But others followed very quickly.

In 815 the Church of John the Baptist at Oberföhring sent its yearly tribute to the Bishop of Freising in the form of one young wild boar, two fat hens, one goose, and a wagon-load of beer (*una carrada de cervisa*). Bishops then as now were fully as much concerned with their physical comforts as with their spiritual welfare. In 819 the tribute paid to another bishop consisted of forty loaves of bread, one pig, three young wild boars, three hens, fifteen eggs, and three barrels of beer.

The first organized brewing was a monopoly of the Bavarian monks. They brewed two qualities: a good, strong, holier-than-thou beer for the clergy, and a poor, weak-sinner sort for the laity. This last was known as *Afterbier*, which is to say, hind-quarter beer, dregs beer, mock beer, near beer. It was a bad-tasting, bad-smelling flimsy small beer specially brewed for charitable purposes and sold freely by the all-powerful bishops and their vicars everywhere to beggars, pilgrims, lay brothers, docile nuns and strangers within their gates.

The favorite refreshments of the clergy

themselves were fine bread and their own special brew. In the Tenth Century, at the St. Gallerkloster, Deacon Ekkehart distinguished himself and made many converts to the ascetic life by serving seven meals a day to his friars, all with bread, and five with strong beer as well. There was no share-and-share-alike nonsense in the souls of the medieval church fathers. Rather than "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you," their motto was "Heads I win, tails you lose." The laity never got a chance to quaff anything better than *Afterbier* except on very special holy days.

Afterbier was said to be of a strength about equal to water. Forty-four glasses of it contained the same amount of alcohol as one glass of wine. It would come well within the American half-percent outrage of today. The monks rightly considered it fit only for laymen and nuns. It sometimes went by the derisive names of *Covent*, *Kofent*, or *Klosterbier*, to separate it from the pure and potent *Patresbier* reserved by the rev. fathers in God.

In those happy days in Bavaria every beggar who climbed up the hill to a monastery had the right to one *Pfennig* in cash alms, but as a glass of *Afterbier* cost more than that *Pfennig*, and as every mendicant arrived dry at the hill-top and stood whetting his thirst while waiting for his penny to be handed out at the alms window, the gift was merely a grand gesture, a diplomatic lure, a small rebate on the