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ATHENAEUM CLUB TO ADMIT VISITORS

THAT the Athenaeum has decided to bow to the modern spirit and admit visitors will astonish those who know anything about this famous London club, probably the most famous club in the world. While there may be a great deal of truth in the remark made by Lord Acton to the effect that the real aristocrats of clubland in this generation are those who stay away, the Athenaeum can probably boast a more distinguished list of members than any other club in the world. It has been distinguished and exclusive ever since it was founded. Of the muster roll of Athenaeum members in 80 years, as is noted by J. P. Collins, in the Boston Transcript, no fewer than 70 have been buried in Westminster Abbey, and about three dozen in St. Paul's, a record that no other club in England can boast or is ever likely to equal. It was a matter of extreme difficulty to gain admittance to the Athenaeum, and scholarship was supposed to be the chief recommendation to a new member. But under one of its rules a distinguished person may be invited to become a member. Kipling was admitted under this rule, but Thackeray, who was also a member, used to rather boast that he had not sought this "second storey" method of gaining admittance, but had taken his chances by the ballot.

Hard to Get in.

How dangerous these chances were in the old times days, when Croker, Rogers, or Greville had a voice in the matter, is indicated by a story they tell of Rogers. One day when he was attending the election committee a young peer was proposed who had everything, to recommend him—good looks, wealth, brains and popularity. Rogers squirmed under the catalogue of virtues, but at last exclaimed: "Thank God! he's got bad teeth." Whereupon he dropped in the black ball, and the candidature of the peer was brought to an end. It was under a portrait of Rogers that Sydney Smith, another Athenaeum member, wrote "Painted during his lifetime," thus indicating the ghastly, death's head appearance of the poet, one of whose chief delights was to black-ball intrepid persons who offered themselves as members in the famous club.

Made Famous by Hook.

Among the chief original members of the Athenaeum were John Wilson Croker, the Quarterly Reviewer, who appears in Coningsby as "Rigby," and once defeated Macaulay in debate. Sir Walter Scott, Sir Humphry Davy, Farraday, Sir Thomas Lawrence, the painter, Tom

in debate; Sir Walter Scott, Sir Humphry Davy, Faraday, Sir Thomas Lawrence, the painter; Tom Moore, and Theodore Hook. It is remarkable indeed that it should have been left to a rake and practical joker like Hook to give the Athenaeum its first great reputation as a home of men of wit and wisdom. Yet it was Hook, and a few friends who gathered round him at a table known ironically as "Temperance Corner," who produced the epigrams and witticisms that spread through London and established the reputation of the Athenaeum. It is said that when Hook departed, the club's coffee house receipts fell off by £300 a year. That the Athenaeum did not seek a reputation as a hard-drinking club, despite its old debt to Hook and other bon vivants, is indicated by a story to the effect that on one occasion a member demanded gin, and finding that there was none in the club, did not abate his demands. So a bottle was procured, and placed upon the sideboard, duly labeled, "Col. F's Bottle of Gin."

Library its Chief Boast.

Another story, however, indicates the sound judgment of the Athenaeum stewards in the matter of wines. Every Summer when the club is being renovated it exchanges members with the United Service Club over the way, and it is related that on one occasion when two grizzled veterans were sipping the Athenaeum port with gusto, not unmixed with respect, one remarked to the other: "Really, these middle classes do themselves very well." However, it is its library that is the chief boast of the Athenaeum, and probably it was so in the day when Landseer, who was no wit, remarked as he was eating a steak in the Athenaeum: "They say there is nothing like leather; this steak is." A list of some of the more distinguished members show that the Athenaeum can afford to smile in a dignified manner at any aspersions upon its cuisine, and that a club of such noble traditions may be excused if it affects an air of superiority to other clubs.

Some Famous Members.

Carlyle used to be a member, though he rarely appeared there, and said little or nothing when he did. Manning used to look in, but Newman declined an invitation to join when he was at the height of his Oxford fame. Darwin was a member, but appeared rarely, but others who assembled there regularly were Nassau Senior, the authority on sport; Richard Burton, the Arabian scholar and explorer; Lytton, the novelist; Greville, the diarist; James Smith, of the "Rejected Addresses"; Frank Buckland, the naturalist; Leighton, the painter and Academy president; Hamley, of "The Art of War"; Chinnery, editor of the Times; Rawlinson, the Ninevite antiquary; and Trollope, the novelist. "Nothing under a Bishop" was the rough and ready rule of membership in the Athenaeum, and, while this rule may have been disregarded on occasions, the club was still the most exclusive in London, the very citadel of clubland it has been called. Now it lets down the drawbridge.