

assorted benefit galas.

The best social publicists work behind the scenes, of course, which is not to say that highly visible toilers in the social vineyard like Luther, Anderson and Gully lack in expertise. The trio has a formidable list of "wins"; but it is also true that the names of some of the best social publicists are unknown. At least two southern California grande dames have been known to perform introductions—the tab in one case was an ankle-length sable coat, in another, a round-the-world trip, all expenses paid. But such deals are the exception rather than the rule.

There are several "most coveted" social circles in Los Angeles, and the big prize is probably awarded to the Amazing Blue Ribbon 400, Mrs. Norman Chandler's electric music center support group. But the Colleagues, the UCLA Art Council, the KCET Women's Council, various philanthropic groups affiliated with hospitals, Pepperdine University's Inner Circle, all these are choice. (Pepperdine at the moment is a house divided against itself; in one corner is Mrs. California Republican, Margaret Martin Brock, in the other corner, Mrs. Frank R. Seaver, both women of integrity, intelligence and generosity who split over the Reagan-Ford presidential contest!)

The Los Angeles Herald Examiner's Anne Thompson Smith, doyenne of social chroniclers in southern California is generally very anti social publicists.

"In the first place, anyone who has to hire a press agent to get into society probably doesn't belong there," Mrs. Smith says firmly. "I can understand a businessman coming here and wanting to get to know the right people for business reasons. But I can't understand anyone who wants to get in socially, taking this route.

"But it has been done several times with rather prominent people who should have been able to make it on their own," Mrs. Smith continues. "But in all cases the press agent has always been kept hidden. The real way to get into society is, if you know someone, to have that person introduce you around. You can also climb by working for various charities and making donations. Money is very important these days, and that's unfortunate. The whole world is changing," said Mrs. Smith who for years received exclusive invitations "New values have taken over, and in some areas, background is no longer considered important. But background is often the difference between being a lady and not being a lady."

Generally tales of the exploits of social climbers in Los Angeles sound as

though they have been scripted by Neil Simon. There is the classic episode which occurred during the Los Angeles visit of Mrs. Angus Ogilvy, daughter of Britain's Duke and Duchess of Kent. At a lengthy receiving line in the Founders of the Music Center, hosted by Mrs. Richard Wolford and other presidents of the Blue Ribbon 400, one 400 member (a lavish donor to charity and founder of several valuable civic groups) became so enthralled at the pleasures of shaking a royal hand that she kept slipping into a new place in line. After her third royal handshake, Her Royal Highness, who has learned a thing or three about receiving lines, said with some amusement, but crisply, "We seem to have met before in this line, madame. We'll shake hands once more, but that will be it."

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Embarrassed 400 members who heard the exchange were shocked, not at the royal comment, but that the hand-shaker showed absolutely no embarrassment.

"She recognized me," the woman said with deep pleasure.

To social climb, it takes a thick skin, a padded bank account, and blinders to keep one's eyes from community problems which cry out for solutions. Some drop out of the race early on, and are happy to pay their publicists off and part company before Jody Jacobs has noticed them even once.

"I stopped being interested in social life here when the Watts riots broke out," one Brentwood woman said recently.

"I love people, and I like to go and wear beautiful evening gowns," admitted another westside woman. "But my husband and I turn down all big parties except political fund-raisers. Watergate shook us up; we watched television each night during the hearings and realized that everything this country stood for almost went down the drain. Now I think these women who spend even a dollar trying to get in with the right groups are crass or maybe sick."

Lee Anderson, a handsome, well-born English woman who handles social publicity with polish and panache feels that everybody wants to know more and better people. Admitting that she has helped George Hamilton, the Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitneys circulate properly, she is also reported to

have said that Merle Oberon asked her to "thin her list of friends out." Why a man whose middle name is Vanderbilt and whose final name is Whitney would have to have help circulating properly is as fascinating a subject as that of weeding one's friends out. Happy gardening!

"Every society has its particular kind of acceptable neurosis and fame is America's cultural defense," writes John Lahr, in "Notes on Fame" in the January issue of *Harper's* (the political magazine, not the fashion periodical). In the same scholarly journal, same month, Tom Bethell, one of the magazine's Washington editors, notes with some shock that "image or style has become an indispensable component of substance." Bethell was inspired to verbiage by a glimpse of the slick Fairchild publication *W in W*. Averell Harriman's Georgetown mailbox. Bethell comes to the conclusion that style is not frivolous or lightweight if it is issue-oriented.

"Washington insiders and such types don't wear Saville Row suits, they wear the issues," Bethell writes after describing how one social couple—who didn't have to climb because he was already an heir to the R. J. Reynolds tobacco fortune—were removed from their pedestals by *Washington Post* society columnist Sally Quinn.

"Quinn functions rather like a Seventh Avenue buyer who fingers the material to test its quality," Bethell writes. "It's all pretty parvenu stuff, she has been concluding of late, and she lost no time in tossing the Smith Bagleys into the reject bin."

There's a moral here for those considering an investment, the equivalent to the price of say a Rolls-Royce, on a social publicist. You might get your name into the social columns once too often, then some writer with a social conscience and a depth of perception might come along and relegate you to the depths of oblivion again. You'd be out all that money. Lee Anderson would prune you from Merle Oberon Wolders' list of friends. The maitre d' at the Bistro or at Jimmy's wouldn't recognize you, and I. Magnin would refuse to messenger your dress over for a big party.

Nothing is hopeless, however. Should the above happen, be smart, have your own party. Make a point of not inviting society reporters, spread the rumor that the best parties are never mentioned in the media, and you can start a whole new thing. For all you know Gucci just might follow suit and create a nonstatus loafer and belts without a G.