

OMAHA

A CITY THAT BUT RECENTLY FOUND HERSELF

This is not going to be any dry-as-dust statistical article. It is going to be just the plain, matter-of-fact story of a city that has but recently found herself. It is the easiest thing in the world for a man who can write a little to go into a city and work up an article full of the bull con, tell all about how it is the biggest and best, her business vast to infinity—and all that sort of thing. But what's the use? I am going to skip all that stuff and confine myself to a few pertinent facts, and in them there may be something of censure as well as much of commendation. But I rather think I know Omaha. For more than a dozen years I worked upon one of her leading daily newspapers, during which time I covered every run that could be devised by an ingenious city editor, and I handled every desk from that of night telegraph editor to that of the man who wrote the heavy editorials. I hold to the opinion that any man who does this sort of thing learns much more about a city than he who merely sits in a counting room, or even he who assumes to be a political leader. Because I lived in Omaha for years, made hosts of warm friends and, I hope, a few enemies; and because I am proud of her, I assign myself to this task.

Omaha has always been a mighty good market town; has always been a city full of live, energetic business men. But for a long

models of their kind, they employ many hundreds of people, pay hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in wages, and are owned and operated by big-hearted, generous men. I know them—all of them. They are not responsible for the long-standing misconception of Omaha.

If I only knew Omaha from what I have heard about her from well-intentioned people who were never there, I probably would believe that it is a mighty wicked city. But I happen to know the contrary. Omaha isn't a Sunday school town—not by a whole lot. But she is far-an-away from being the sink hole of corruption that some would-be reformers would have you believe. Omaha, with her suburbs, has a population of approximately 200,000 people; people of all races and colors and nationalities. I claim that all things considered, age and location, and other things, that there is less of crime and vice in Omaha than there is in enough Nebraska towns outside of Douglas county to make a city as large as Omaha. I know something of sociology, something of the present campaign to eradicate the causes of poverty and to elevate the standard of human life—and I am right here to assert that in these splendid works Omaha is playing a leading part. I defy you to find another city of approximate size with so little of poverty,



time Omaha was afflicted by two things—provincialism and false friends. The men who were busy making a big city, developing industry and trade, were so intent upon that task that they overlooked the fact that a city, like a man, can not live to itself. And while these men who were building a city devoted their every energy to that purpose, other men who were building nothing and accomplishing nothing worth while, were doing all of Omaha's talking for her. And their talk was such as to arouse the resentment of sober, thoughtful citizens elsewhere in the state. To judge by the daily conversation of this element Omaha's chief business was "booze," her whole prosperity bound up in "booze" and her only citizens worth while were those who depended upon "booze." We who knew the real Omaha knew that this is not, and never was, true. But the men of Omaha who should have been telling the rest of the country about the real Omaha were too busy building a really big city.

But as time progressed these big, brainy business men came to realize that there was something more to city building than the erection of big buildings and employing armies of wage earners. They caught a glimmer of the fact that a city really worth while is one that not only builds big buildings and employs armies of people, but also makes life for these armies of the employed worth while by building parks and playgrounds, by maintaining fine schools, by cultivating friendships and by taking an intelligent interest in the welfare of those upon whom it most depended for its commercial prosperity. And with this realization was born the Omaha of today—big, busy, hospitable; proud of its position as the commercial metropolis of Nebraska, and proud because it is in and of and for Nebraska. So, exit the men who so long put Omaha in a false light before the people of the state, and enter upon the scene of action the men who were really responsible for this big, busy and beautiful city.

They are rightfully proud of what they have done and are doing, and they are such royal hosts that they maintain a publicity bureau to tell about it, having a capable man in charge who knows most about her and wants to know the rest. It's his duty to show you the real Omaha, to see to it that you learn all about the Omaha that is and unlearn a lot you have accumulated. But these busy men are not too busy to help. They've got this man on the job because he doesn't have to sleep or eat—all he has to do is to do the honors. When a city gets so big and busy and proud that it employs a man to tell you all about it you can bet that city is going some, believe me.

Omaha always was glad to be the hostess of her "country cousins." She always had a table well spread to which they were welcome. But Omaha used to be too blamed busy to sit down and eat with her guests; too busy to observe those little social amenities that mean so much. She is busier now than ever before, but she has cultivated the social graces, and today her guests do not have to entertain themselves. They are met at the front door with the glad hand, their wraps are taken off and hung on the hall tree, they are shown the best room, given the easiest chairs, and while they are enjoying the best the hostess is right there, joining in the conversation, keeping the humidor filled, the water pitcher iced and a savory odor wafting upwards from the culinary regions. Visitors are not a bit more welcome today than they ever were—but Omaha has learned the difference between a welcome and a welcome.

I said something about "booze" a little while ago. Please do not misunderstand me. Omaha does a big business in the brewing of beer and the distilling of liquor. Just as legitimate a business as yours or mine, too. But the brewing of beer is a mighty small part of the grand total of Omaha's business, big as that brewery business is. Maybe you are prejudiced against breweries. That's all right. But I want to tell you that Omaha's breweries are

so little of exploitation of the weak and helpless, so little of vice and crime; another city of approximate size with so much of charity, so much of earnest and intelligent welfare work, so many big-hearted and whole-souled men and women making daily sacrifices of time and money and energy to be of benefit to their fellows. This is the real Omaha that we are just beginning to learn something about; not the Omaha you were led to believe it was by the leatherlungs but irresponsible gentlemen who hold that the chief end of man is to whoop 'er up from the alcoholic standpoint. Omaha isn't a bit different than she was ten or twenty years ago—she just seems different because she is letting us look at her from another angle.

I'm not proud of Omaha because I used to live there; I am proud of her because she is not only the metropolis of Nebraska, but is a real credit to this state. And believe me, it takes a mighty good city to be a credit to such a state as Nebraska. No provincial, hide-bound, grasping community of souls could be a credit to this magnificent commonwealth. But Omaha, big, enthusiastic, optimistic, generous, enterprising, growing Omaha—well, I'm almighty proud of being a Nebraskan, and a part of that pride is due to the fact that Omaha is a part of the state.

The real Omaha is coming into her own because she is making herself known for what she really is. The men primarily responsible for Omaha are asserting themselves. They are no longer content to dig and delve and figure and plan while incompetents do all the talking for the city. They are still busy at digging and delving and figuring and planning, but they've learned to do something else—they've learned the wisdom of pausing now and then to get a fresh hold, and while getting it they do their own talking. And having a lot to talk about they often have to point with their hands at one thing they are proud of while talking proudly of something else. They are now frank to admit that she owes her prosperity primarily to Nebraska; that as Nebraska prospers so Omaha prospers, and they are eager to identify themselves with the great work of developing the great resources and possibilities of this commonwealth. You, my good friends, who live outside of Omaha, have no moral right to criticize her until you become better acquainted with her. You have no moral right to take the word of men who make a living by creating the impression that conditions are awful, then offering their services at so much per to reform them. You have no more right to judge Omaha by her worst than you have to judge humankind by its criminals.

But I am not commissioned to prepare a brief in defense of Omaha. She needs no defense at my hands, nor at the hands of any man. As Daniel Webster said of Massachusetts, so Omahans say: "We shall enter upon to eponyms of Omaha—she needs none. There she is—behold her, and judge for yourselves!" Behold her, not the portrait painted by the fanatic or the jealous-minded, but the real, living busy Omaha that is the commercial metropolis of a vast domain that makes leading empires small by comparison, and which is doing a full part in the great work of development.

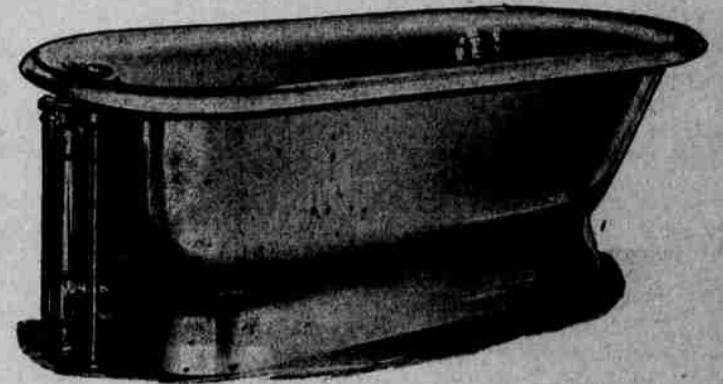
I have been telling you about the real Omaha—the Omaha that I know; the Omaha that really is; the Omaha that has at last found herself. She hasn't reached full maturity yet. She is growing so fast that she is often put to it to find suitable clothing, clothing that will meet the demands of good taste. She is troubled by the fact that the modest skirt of yesterday may reveal and undue amount of limb today, for Omaha is growing. But she is doing her best—and Omaha's best makes a record that would-be rivals can only talk about, seldom equal and never surpass.

Miss Omaha, a child of Nebraska! Just as she is daily reflecting honor upon her mother, so her mother daily grows prouder of her offspring.

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