

# Doings at the Den of Samson's Jolly Knights

Photographs Specialty for The  
By Louis R. Bostwick.

for their purposes. Having arranged for its purchase they returned to Omaha. Gus Renze was left at New Orleans to dismantle the floats and ship the scenic mountings to Omaha.

With such surroundings it was not surprising that the Omaha ambassadors to the court of Rex were enabled to win favorable attention from their fellow passengers, and it was through a chance acquaintance thus picked up enroute that the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben owe much of the mysticism that has ever attended their secret work. There were aboard the train two Catholic priests, one of whom, Father Enright of Kansas City, was a linguist of surpassing attainments and a great reader of history. To this learned gentleman was outlined the purposes of the organization, and when Ak-Sar-Ben was suggested as its name, he readily applied to it his knowledge of language and deciphered in it, as the committee recalls it, three ancient roots, "Ak" from the Arabic, "Sar" from the Syrian, and "Ben" from the Hebrew, meaning altogether "The Head of the Household."

## Ritual for the Initial Year.

Upon their return data was turned over to Lewis M. Rheem, who possessed talent that qualified him to compile a ritual for the secret work, which he did, with the assistance of Edgar Allen. It is claimed by old knights that the ritual which these gentlemen supplied for the ceremonial sessions of Ak-Sar-Ben in its initial year was far prettier and more impressive than any that has ever since been followed. So much did the knighthood appreciate Mr. Rheem's services in that respect that when, early in the next year, he resigned his position from the Board of Governors to take his departure from the city, he was tendered a banquet by his fellow members of the board in recognition of his talent and readiness in the early work of the order.

Immediately upon the return of the committee from New Orleans active efforts were begun for enlarging the membership of the knighthood and provide the necessarily large revenues for carrying on its work. Odd Fellows' hall, at the corner of Fourteenth and Dodge streets, was secured and the secret and mystic rites were exemplified there to all who could be induced to join.

The original ten members, R. S. Wilcox, Walter Jardine, T. A. Fry, W. L. Dickey, H. J. Penfold, Dudley Smith, Elmer E. Bryson, Edgar Allen, L. M. Rheem and E. M. Bartlett, were initiated at a meeting held May 23, 1895, at which time the ritual was adopted. The first meeting for initiation was held July 15, 1895, when J. E. Utt, Thomas Hamlin, W. R. Bennett, Daniel Farrell, T. P. Cartwright, Frank Adams, John C.

Drexel, J. H. White, H. J. Burket, M. C. Peters, J. M. Steele and seven members of the board of managers of the state fair, including Messrs. Eli A. Barnes, Milton Doolittle, Martin Duham, J. B. Dinsmore, E. L. Vance, R. W. Furnas and S. C. Bassett, were subjected to the tests of the ritual. As the membership grew exemplification of the work was conducted by a large number of dignitaries with high sounding titles and brilliant court costumes. The personnel of the official list is not obtainable, but it is recalled that E. M. Bartlett was grand mufti. The chief officer of the den has always been known by that name, and so remains.

## Lease Coliseum for a Den.

About the middle of June, 1895, the knights leased the old Coliseum for a den, that being the only building in the city large enough to fulfill the requirements, owing to the fact that the membership each year since the organization of the order has ranged from 300 in 1895 to a possible 1,200 in 1900.

Few of the secret societies have been able to hedge about with greater mystery the details of their ritualistic work than have the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, each individual upon entering pledging not to disclose his experiences. The mystery that always surrounds the events transpiring in the den has certainly done much to popularize the order, and the

membership has undoubtedly been swelled each year by that innate curiosity which prompts men to explore hidden realms and participate in anything that is deemed exclusive. It was in conserving this potent air of mystery that the organization in May of the year of its birth decided that Samson should be its ruling minister. All correspondence with the dignitaries of Ak-Sar-Ben's court must be addressed to Samson, who stands in such a position of favor and intimacy with Uncle Sam that everything addressed thus reaches him readily. As prime minister to the king Samson issues and publishes all proclamations and decrees and is, although his identity is unknown, the official through whom the king effects all his dealings with his subjects.

As the year 1895 drew toward its close the members of the board of governors decided that it would be unwise to have an entire new board elected each year, and arranged, therefore, that three of the twelve officers should hold for a term of one year, three for two, three for three years and three for four years. They accordingly drew straws to determine the terms for which they should serve, with the result that the one-year term fell to E. M. Bartlett, L. M. Rheem and Thomas A. Fry; the two-year term to R. S. Wilcox, Dudley Smith and W. L. Dickey; the three-year term to H. J. Penfold, Clement Chase and W. R. Bennett, and the four-year term to John E. Utt, Walter Jardine and E. E. Bryson.

## First Records Missing.

This practically completes the sketch of the organization of Ak-Sar-Ben, which, in the absence of complete records, has been gleaned chiefly from investigation and inquiry among its earliest members. There is no record of the list of lodge officers for secret work during the initial year, but the official records of the order show that December 9, 1896, at the annual meeting, a complete list was chosen for the following year, comprising: Most noble grand mufti, Henry D. Estabrook; most noble grand vizier, Dr. E. W. Lee; most noble grand prophet, C. S. Potter; lord keeper of the records, M. C. Peters; lord keeper of the exchequer, H. J. Penfold; lord herald, L. P. Funkhouser; lord executioner, Arthur Guion; lord conductor, W. R. Bennett; inside guard, W. L. Hawkes; sentinel, T. G. Magrane. Subsequently Mr. Estabrook was succeeded as grand mufti by W. R. Bennett. Subsequently also John E. Utt retired from the board of governors, with the thanks of the leading promoters of the order for his effective work in devising and aiding in its organization, and was succeeded by H. Vance Lane.

At the annual meeting of December 9, 1896, Mr. Penfold introduced a resolution directing attention to the fact that the recent Transmississippi congress had unanimously adopted a resolution favoring an exposition in this city in 1898, and pledging the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben to take hold of the enterprise and by unceasing effort pursue the enterprise to a glorious finish.

It is not the purpose of this sketch to pursue the history of the order down through the years following that of its organization. It has been a success, without question. Through the years of drouth and stringent financial depression it has pursued its purposes with a zeal and energy that have astonished many neighboring cities. It has always observed an unvarying rule to keep within its means and the people have been given just as much glory and splendor as they were willing to pay for, for the organization would not go into debt. Its revenues have been derived from subscriptions by merchants and capitalists and the \$10 fee charged its members, which have supplied sufficient funds.



THE BATH OF THE SACRED ELEPHANT.

