

FUTURE OF OUR AK-SAR-BEN

Full and Free Discussion of Its Shortcomings and Defects.

SUGGESTIONS ALSO FOR IMPROVEMENT

Features that have been Outgrown or Failed to Meet with Approval Should Be Discarded.

OMAHA, Oct. 14.—To the Editor of The Bee—Now that the Ak-Sar-Ben festivities are over for this year and the success of the undertaking as a whole beyond question, I take it that a person can call attention to some of its shortcomings and include in some pertinent criticism without putting himself in the category of a "knocker." Ak-Sar-Ben has done much for Omaha, but still has much to do, and unless we are willing to recognize its weak spots and attempt to remedy them in time, the difficulties ahead are bound to increase and one or two years of financial failure may founder it into shipwreck.

Ak-Sar-Ben started out ten years ago on a comparatively modest scale, and has gradually extended until today it includes a large number of distinct and separate features. Let me take them up one by one, explaining when they are good and when we will be able to discuss more intelligently what parts should be retained, what transformed or improved, and what discontinued altogether.

The Secret Society and Initiation. Ak-Sar-Ben is a huge secret society with a membership recruited each year from among the business and professional citizens of Omaha. The annual dues are \$10, which include initiation fee as well as entitling members to all the privileges of attending street parades, ball and annual banquet or dramatic performance. The initiation ritual is the most elaborate that has been prepared for any secret society in existence and each member is required to be initiated each year. The weekly meetings for initiation of new members are social gatherings for good fellowship and entertainment not only of members, but also of guests from abroad for all of whom refreshments are provided.

The Street Pageants. Ak-Sar-Ben puts on each year two street pageants—one a daylight parade and the other a night parade. The daylight parade is varied from year to year, while the night parade has consisted of electrically illuminated floats arranged in series to represent a chosen theme. The parades have always been free to all who choose to view them—men, women and children—irrespective of residence in or out of Omaha.

The Grand Court Ball. This affair has been intended to rank as a society function. The ceremonial is quite elaborate, culminating in the crowning of a king and the selection by him of the queen, which is followed by dancing with intermission for a supper for the participants. Up to the present year it has been possible for outsiders to be admitted as spectators, but this year the ball was reserved exclusively for members and their accompanying ladies.

The Mask Ball. Only one mask ball has been promoted by Ak-Sar-Ben and that in an experimental way. It was designed to be a more popular re-lex of the grand court ball, with prizes within the reach of all. In a word, to furnish amusement and entertainment for the people who could not afford to attend the larger affair.

The Street Fair. The street fair is a cheap imitation of the Midway of our two expositions. A ground-work for the amusement features is afforded by the booths containing exhibits of merchandise from our retail stores and the display of agricultural products labeled "County Fair," but the backbone of it is the line of merry-go-rounds and sideshows, with the confetti concession at each corner. The music and the free performances serve to draw the flies.

The Annual Meeting. The annual meeting has usually taken the form of a banquet attended by all the members and followed by a business session. Last year the banquet was omitted and instead all the tickets of a theatrical performance were purchased and distributed to the members to make sure that they would attend in sufficient numbers to permit of the transaction of business.

So much for Ak-Sar-Ben as it has been evolved in the course of ten years' development. Now for a little criticism and suggestion.

Set Limit to the Numbers. Ak-Sar-Ben's continuance depends upon the perpetuation of the secret society. Here is where its novelty is most striking. Here is where it has attained fame far and wide. It is useless to deny, however, that there has been much whispered complaint about the methods and management of the order. The board of twelve governors has gradually become a close corporation, replenished when vacancies occur or expire by co-optation. True, a form of recommendation by the full membership is preserved, but these recommendations seem to have no weight with the board of governors. In fact, few of the new governors in late years have been selected from the lists recommended at the annual meeting. There is perhaps some reason for this, because the recommendations have not been particularly happy. It is, moreover, highly desirable that all the business interests of the community be represented on the board and also that the men be qualified for the work they are to do, and with a promiscuous membership, influenced by all the considerations that figure in ordinary wire-pulling, the chances are that these essentials are overlooked.

The present conditions, therefore, are really a natural result of the unwieldy expansion of the society. This year over 1,300 members were enrolled, with various unpleasant consequences, to say nothing of the labor and expense incurred in drumming up applicants for admission. It seems to me that a limit should be put upon the membership roll. One thousand members would be quite enough, and in that case more discrimination could be exercised in the make-up of the organization. During the first few years every application for membership had to be passed on and approved by the board of governors, and any member had a right to protest against being associated with any applicant to whom he objected, the same as in any other secret society. There is no reason why this feature should not be reintroduced.

Build Up Permanent Membership. The membership then should also be made permanent, as was suggested by The Bee a year ago, although annual initiations might still be required. This would do away with a large part of the work of the hustling committee and a chance is given to those who are willing to be associated with any applicant to whom he objected, the same as in any other secret society. There is no reason why this feature should not be reintroduced.

RISE AND FALL OF WAGGAMAN

Extent of the Collapse of a Real Estate Boomer in Washington.

SOME WESTERN PEOPLE AMONG VICTIMS

Catholic Institutions and Catholic Clergymen Extensively Involved—Story of a Boom that Did Not Pan Out.

The failure of Thomas E. Waggaman, a noted real estate speculator in Washington, involves a large number of people in and out of the national capital, besides banks, trust companies, religious and educational corporations. Several prominent people in the west are creditors for various sums, among them being Archbishop Keane of Dubuque and Bishop Garrigan of Sioux City.

The Waggaman family, of which Thomas E. Waggaman is the principal in the present trouble, have been conspicuous in the business and social life of Washington for half a century. On several occasions members of Omaha's social and business circles have been invited to the Waggaman home—hospitably as lavishly as and dispensed in a city noted for its social extravagance.

The history of the family in this country goes back to Captain Ephraim Waggaman, who was sheriff of Worcester county, Maryland, in 1752. His children intermarried with the well known families of Woodford and Ennals. The oldest son of Captain Waggaman was Henry Woodford, and he had three sons, namely: George A. Waggaman, who settled in Louisiana and was sent to the United States senate in 1831; Dr. Henry Waggaman of Dorchester and Thomas Ennals Waggaman, who married Martha Jefferson Tyler, sister of President John Tyler.

There were three sons from this marriage, two of whom, Major George W. Waggaman, U. S. A., and Floyd W. Waggaman, died without issue. John H. Waggaman, the eldest, lived to an advanced age and died in Washington, where his four sons now reside. The eldest of these is Thomas E. Waggaman.

Waggaman's Start. Young T. E. Waggaman started his business life in Washington by selling papers. Then he went into the real estate business and in a few years was known as one of the four prominent real estate men in the district.

During this time he had become a convert to the Catholic faith and was conspicuous as a churchman. When the work of Governor Shepherd of Washington resulted in a decided rise of real estate values in the city and suburbs, Waggaman had considerable capital at his command, largely from Catholic sources. From that period up to 1902 the city grew rapidly, and as Mr. Waggaman's investments enhanced in value and became part of Washington property, he disposed of, and a large portion of the proceeds re-invested in real estate holdings in the outskirts and suburbs.

His business continued to extend rapidly, largely through his church acquaintance, but in some measure through his ability to make paying investments. The rate of interest he paid to investors was 6 per cent, and he continued this rate even during the occasional slumps in real estate values, when his competitors would not do so. He was, however, not too high. During these years his business standing was enhanced, money for investment poured in upon him in constantly increasing amounts, and his personal fortunes grew correspondingly.

Waggaman's misfortunes began in 1902. In that year he was recognized as the foremost real estate broker in Washington; his wealth was variously estimated at from \$1,000,000 to \$10,000,000, people felt over one another in his ability to hand him money to invest.

Up to this time he had made his invariable practice to secure investors by straight out mortgages on the property purchased for them, but as he acquired more and more unimproved and consequently unproductive holdings, he began to gradually begin to depreciate, he changed his tactics. To some investors he gave collateral notes, to others his own personal notes and to others simply a receipt for the money deposited with him.

THE OMAHA DAILY BEE: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1904.

Special sale of stock Rugs, made up from short lengths of carpet and border, (new lot) on sale Monday.

Table listing various rug types and prices, including 8-3x10 Extra Axminster, 8-3x8-9 Brussels, etc.

500 yards velvet and tapestry used for the Coronation Ball will be on sale at very low prices Monday morning at 8 o'clock.

LACE CURTAINS. We are showing all the new and novel effects in lace curtains and at prices that are right at all times.

BRUSSELS CURTAINS. Over 1,000 pairs of \$5 Brussels are now being sold in our drapery department at, per pair, \$3.95.

ARABIAN CURTAINS. Over 30 styles, every pair worth \$10.00, special for Monday, per pair, \$7.50.

Electric Reading Lamps, new complete line, from \$3.50 up to \$75.00 all the newest styles. Lamp—See our crystal lamp, at \$2.75, complete.

excess of all claims. The values placed upon the various assets by Waggaman are deemed excessive, and Washington opinion is that the property will not pay out by \$1,000,000 more than expected.

Clerical Creditors. The list of creditors of Mr. Waggaman reads much like a directory of the Catholic church. The secured creditors are: Catholic University of America, \$81,128; the value of the securities given to the university, the Washington Star says they are appraised at only \$100,000; James Cardinal Gibbons, \$25,000; estate of Pedro Gonzalez, administrator diocese of Havana, \$10,000; Rev. D. J. Stafford, \$1,000; Rev. A. E. Bostick, treasurer, \$5,000; Rev. Francis James Fitzpatrick, \$1,800; Sisters of the Visitation, Georgetown, \$4,000; president and directors of Georgetown college, \$10,000; Bishop P. J. Donohue, \$10,000; Bishop P. J. Donohue, executor of D. O'Connor, \$2,000; Rev. D. J. Stafford, \$1,000; Rev. A. E. Bostick, treasurer, \$5,000; Rev. Francis James Fitzpatrick, \$1,800; Rev. J. J. Bowler, \$2,000; Rev. James A. Cunningham, \$4,000.

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Orchard; Wilhelm Carpet Co. RUGS RUGS RUGS

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