

Initiatory Ceremony at Ak-Sar-Ben Den Most Inspiring Performance

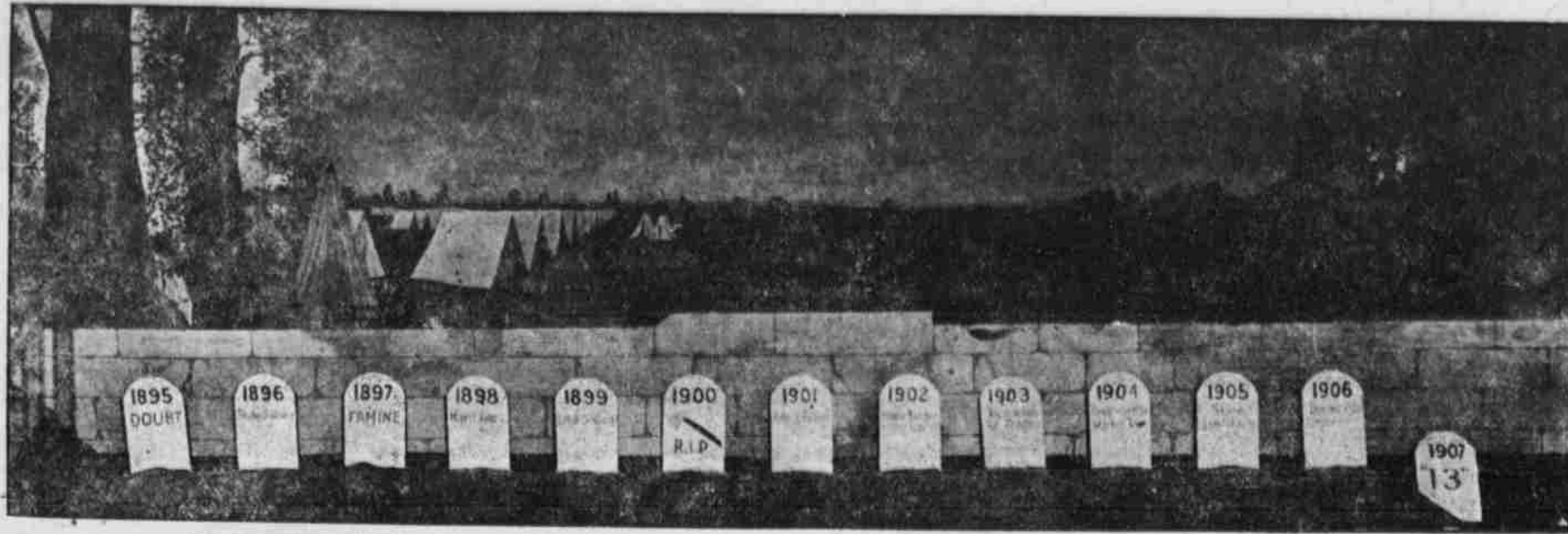
HAST ever been to the Den? What den, you ask, why, is there another den? No, there is but one Den, just one. And if you had ever been there on a Monday night between May and October you would know it.

What is this Den? Well, this Den is the commercial, industrial and agricultural headquarters of Nebraska, the hub of prosperity, home of the business makers of the state. In other words, this Den is the boosters' paradise or the forum of fun that begets results beyond the pale of merely temporary laughter and frolic. This Den is the center from which radiate lines of friendship, sociability, union and enterprise to a circumference that surrounds the interest and welfare of Nebraska, carrying to the boundary of the state one purpose, one plan, one thought—the upbuilding of her interests.

The Den, friends, is the official home of Ak-Sar-Ben and Ak-Sar-Ben is the king of Quivera and Quivera is the richest realm of the universe, because Quivera is Nebraska.

At this Den every Monday night from May until the middle of September demonstrations in honor of the king, with an eye single to his glory and prosperity, are held. These demonstrations are under the general supervision of the initiation team. It is to the arduous toll of this team that much of the ultimate good accomplished by Ak-Sar-Ben is due. This team is made up of substantial and successful men, men who know how to make anything go and yet they are "good fellows," that is, they are the official jollifiers of the king.

Ak-Sar-Ben means booster. Every man who be-



GRAVEYARD WHERE AK-SAR-BEN'S TROUBLES ARE PLANTED DEEP—BATTLEFIELD IN BACKGROUND.

Sar-Ben has flourished and Nebraska has prospered. And through the medium of this splendid institution the resources of the state have been developed beyond the fondest anticipation of the most ardent advocates in the beginning. The name of Ak-Sar-Ben and Nebraska are known in remote places and in notable places where, had it not been for these very ceremonies at the Den, they would not have been known.

But back to the initiation.

Travelers crossing the weary wastes of a desert look and long for that one spot where they may sit

actors—these and those from other high spheres of life, have run the gauntlet. And they have all come out yelling and boasting for Ak-Sar-Ben. It is this fact that King Ak-Sar-Ben is no respecter of persons, that to him the low is as high as the high and the high no higher than the low, that makes him the most popular king who ever swayed a scepter o'er a realm. There is but one exception made to this democracy of spirit and that is in the case of women. No woman ever yet has been admitted to the inner courts of the king's palace, not even his consort, the queen. Not a woman knows of her own mind what the initiation at the Den is like, for she never went through it. She couldn't. It's because of that and not because Ak-Sar-Ben and his male followers have an aversion for the dear, fair ones, that they are excluded from the Den. They simply couldn't.

But what is the initiation? That's it, what is it? You'll never know until you take it. You can't know any other way, for it is too wonderful to be told in words. But if you ever take it you'll know and you'll never forget. It's the most intricate and complex initiatory ceremony extant. Some ancient orders have been known to practice more complicated forms, but these have ceased to exist. Of the secret organizations now in existence none approaches in its initiation the ordeal through which a man must pass to reach the knighthood of Ak-Sar-Ben. And yet never a man has lost his life in the treadmill of this ceremony. All have survived, some perhaps not in the same physical condition in which they entered, but survived nevertheless.

Candidates are admitted in bunches or herds. Nothing is done in the abstract here, everything in the concrete. For the purposes of administration it has been found convenient to name the nights on which the initiation ceremonies are held. For instance, there is bankers' night, wholesalers' night, retailers' night, and so on. And on one of these nights, while special dispensations may be granted to permit the slaughter of a few other victims, special right-of-way is given to men of the calling whose night it is. Towns also have their nights; Fremont, Columbus, Grand Island and so on.

Victims are admitted to the Den by the doors on the south. They are hemmed in by outer guards to the king, who march them through a dark, narrow defile, one by one, until they finally reach the interior of the court. There they are surrounded by a division of the Roman army. Before them exalted stands the centurion and to one side the lictors with their fasces at hand. And here is where the situation begins to get ominous. The lictors, gazing with fixed eyes as big as saucers down upon their prey, slowly draw from their fasces their axes and tossing the bundle aside, seize the axes with both hands, each man advancing to a victim against whose cold and clammy

of a cannon, dropped from the apex of the vast building, suspended by the toes while frisky goats played foot ball with the head—these and other similar experiences have been endured and in each and every case the victim has come out more than alive. This, it is confidently believed, is one of the chief reasons why the humane authorities have never sought to interfere with the ceremonies accompanying the making of an Ak-Sar-Ben knight.

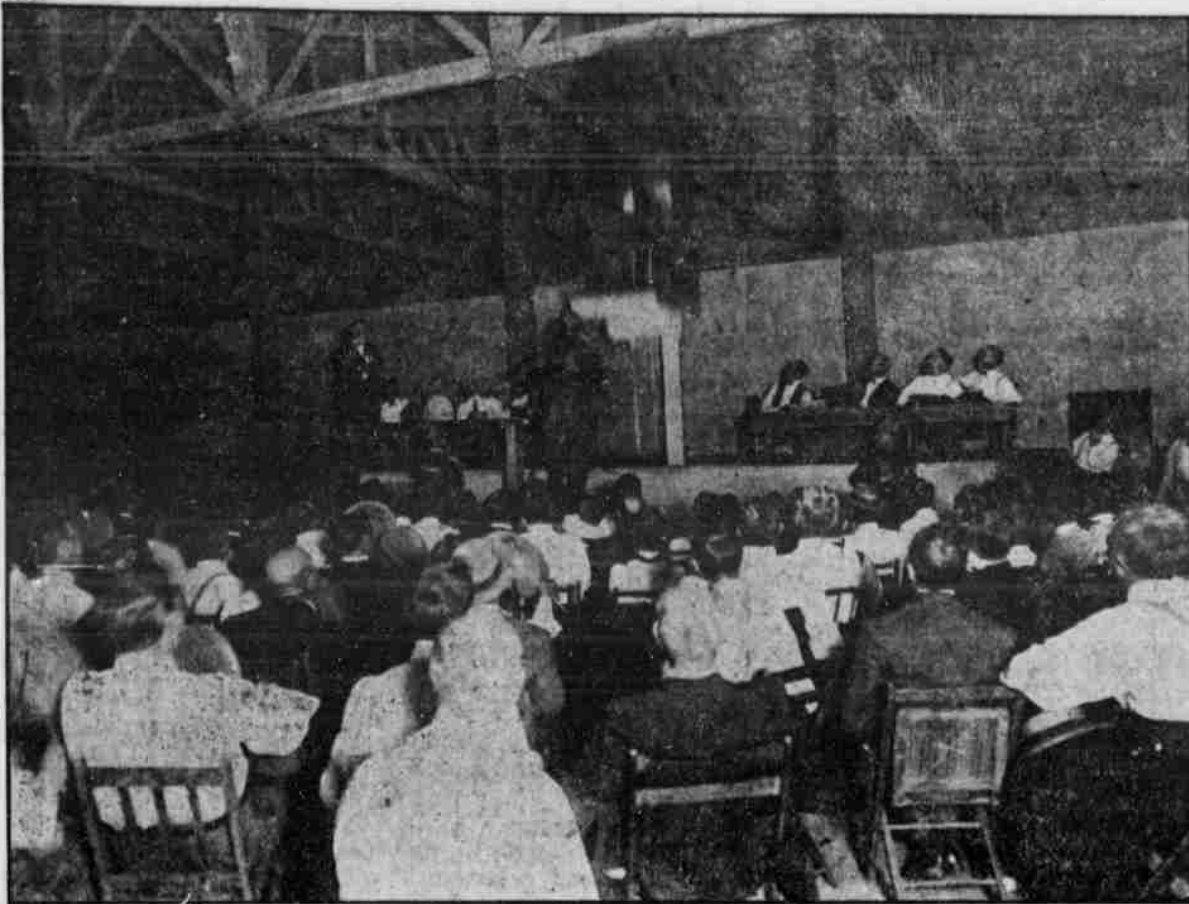
This has been a great season at the Den. Other seasons have seen more eminent men there and yet this one has witnessed one party of gentlemen whose fame is today surpassing in its interest. That is the Omaha base ball team, Western league champions for 1908. Who could be more famous? It has just come to be generally admitted that the reason they won the pennant was the fact that these boys were thorough knights of Ak-Sar-Ben. Barney Oldfield, the great auto dare-devil, is another exceedingly eminent character who has been able to do great things

Having successfully passed the primary stages of the initiation, the recruits are ushered into scenes more inviting. Behold, they stand before the king's counsel, there in solemn words, to hear the message of his majesty! This a scene of surpassing grandeur and imposing dignity. Robed in all the habiliments of royalty, except the purple and the ermine, which only the king can wear, comes the counsel. You see him back through a vista of beautiful drapery, step, as it were, from a throne-seat; slowly and with measured tread, he advances—his menials at his side—until now you can see him clearly enough to distinguish his features. It is a stately figure, a face of rare expression; every feature seeming to denote some high purpose, some lofty ideal. The man is large, well proportioned; his mien is that of a true knight and he speaks with a voice deep, rich and resonant. Now he stands in your presence, you in his. He is a superb specimen of the physical and intellectual. In his hands he holds a scroll. He speaks; his words, like the words of a prophet, seize you and make an impression which you never forget. As he delivers to you his counsels you wonder at the wisdom of the man and wish that you, too, might be a counsel of the great king, Ak-Sar-Ben.

(Soft pedal.)

It should be stated, by way of parenthesis, that during the midnight watches of these few moments of ecstasy, the lights are turned low and the birds sing but softly, the murmuring brook murmurs even more low and everything is attuned to the all-pervading solemnity of this somber scene.

The counsel presents his admonitions, or the admonitions of his majesty, in a voice of fine articulation and a basso profundo whisper until he reaches that point when the deeds of the dead years, entombed before you, are to be unfolded. Then he lifts his voice and pours forth his words in such volume that you seem to feel his climaxes burst into veritable showers of water upon you. Indeed, this belief lays hold of you with such consuming force that you are driven to believe you can actually see the silvery threads of pure water falling about you and feel the pitter-patter



SIGNAL SERGEANT KENNEDY CONCLUDES HIS LECTURE.

longs to this organization must boost; he cannot knock.

But it is natural for the ordinary man, in his original state to knock, hence it is necessary that he should undergo a certain process of treatment before he can be safely relied upon as a real booster or a thorough subject of Ak-Sar-Ben. With this thought in mind the founders of this great dynasty conceived in the beginning the necessity of some form of initiation for every man who should be entrusted with the solemn secrets of this order. Therefore, a systematic form of initiation was conjured up. That initiation is based upon the fundamental principles of virtue, love, enterprise, benevolence and progress. Its oaths have been administered to men of all sections of this country as well as to men of other countries. Subjects of other kings have subscribed to the tenets of Ak-Sar-Ben's faith; citizens of republics, peoples of monarchies, of kingdoms, of dependent provinces have passed through this crucible red hot and come out sizzling with the enthusiasm of Ak-Sar-Ben.

Stop and think! It is fit for serious reflection. All jest aside, is there another single agency, factor or influence that has been spent or is being exercised of as far-reaching, impressive and lasting power and benefit for the promotion of Nebraska and its resources, for the spreading of its name and fame, for the upbuilding of its enterprises, for the advertisement of its people's alertness and progressiveness—in short, another one factor which makes as much for the good of the state, at home and abroad, as this very Ak-Sar-Ben?

The answer is too obvious to bear repetition. That answer is reflected in every department of the commercial life of Omaha and the state, in each channel of industry, in every avenue of business. The agricultural, commercial and industrial heart of Nebraska beats faster, and stronger because thirteen years ago a handful of enterprising business men in Omaha, bent on promoting the interests of their city and state, launched this institution. The conception was not for a local affair and Ak-Sar-Ben has never been bound by such narrow restrictions. It has never been intended by Omaha that it should be simply an Omaha concern, but the purpose was to make it a Nebraska institution and that purpose has been as rigidly carried out as it was possible to do. Founded upon broad lines and maintained upon broader lines, Ak-

down and rest after the long, tedious journey has all but exhausted them—an "oasis in the desert." All travelers, of all stations in life, here find common comforts. The high and low alike obtain succor of strenuous toil and travel and alike drink the draught of refreshment and vigor that shall rest them from the old journey and invigorate them for the new.

The initiation at the Den every Monday night is the oasis in the desert of strenuous business activity



NEW RECRUITS TAKING OATH OF ALLEGIANCE.

in the life of Ak-Sar-Ben members. This is the one time when grave cares give way to fickle pleasure, when serious thought surrenders to comedy and the mind that conceives and executes great things is relieved of its burden and filled with fun. It's the best elixir for tired brains and weary bodies.

But aside from this feature the initiation possesses another aspect which makes it especially attractive. It is a concrete democracy of torture. No man, no matter what his station in life may be, is exempt from its ceremonies once he has set foot on the threshold of the Den. Governors, senators, congressmen, bankers, ministers, distinguished travelers,

neck he lays his glistening weapon. But not a man is decapitated; all are finally released from this first bondage, but only to fall into worse hands. The bunch is bivouacked on the floor in front of the spectators and beneath the platform, where the machines of torture await their victims. Here in this lowly posture may sit the governor of the state, or a congressman, or a minister, or a banker, or anyone else, holding his hands over his knees and gazing in pitiful wonder up at his assailants wholly ignorant of the nature of his impending doom.

Truly here is real democracy personified. The governor of a state may be bumping backs with a humble wage-earner, or a national statesman of renown may be loling around with his poorest constituent. It is a federation and association of the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the old and young, but all, all subjects of the king, Ak-Sar-Ben.

From this dejected looking throng are selected those victims who are to be put through the ordeal. The recruiting officer is the chief functionary in this procedure. The victims are led by the officer of the guards and the officer of escort before the colonel of the cavalry, where they undergo a rigid examination as to their moral standing, their physical and financial ability and their mental condition prior to being launched upon the uncertain gamut of initiation proper. Should they attempt to deceive the colonel of the cavalry in any point of information touching themselves it will be instantly detected by the adjutant general or some other dignitary equally as sagacious. This officer will transmit the discovery to the signal sergeant in his tower nearby and the signal sergeant will open up wireless telegraph communication with the sentinels or gate keepers to call on General Gazooks for reinforcements calculated to flitch from the victim the truth and punish him for prevaricating.

As already asserted no man ever has lost his life in the process of this initiation. Shot from the muzzle



MEMBERS OF THE "CAST" OF THE AK-SAR-BEN SHOW.

because he is a knight. Commercial travelers and business men from everywhere have been there, and today ascribe all they are or have to the initiation into Ak-Sar-Ben knighthood. J. Adam Bede, congressman from the Eighth Minnesota district, "the humorist of congress," as he is known the country over, is a knight of the last season. Not so many weeks ago Mr. Bede was at the Den, where he convulsed a large crowd with his irresistible humor, and he told friends after the occasion that, in all seriousness, he had never known anything of the kind to equal it. Governor Sheldon, Lieutenant Governor Hopewell, all the other state officers, judges of various courts in the state, educators, ministers and others of similar callings and prominence are enthusiastic knights and have been at the Den more than once during this season.

Perhaps in no place and no time does this intense spirit of democracy, the permeating, underlying, vitalizing force of the whole institution, so conspicuously assert itself as at the bivouac. Here is where the banker and baker knock elbows, the broker and the butcher bump backs, the capitalist and the carpenter lock legs, or the preacher and the person who doesn't go to church, mix up. Here, in fact, is the hopper into which all the raw material from which knights of Ak-Sar-Ben are produced, is dumped. In one intermingled, indiscriminate mass the heterogeneous elements are thrown and must mix the best they can until they are poured out through the chute after having undergone the same process, a homogeneous formation. As soldiers of one army, marching to one tune and under one banner, so these soldiers of peace, with one mind and one aim, assume a common task when they have come out of the tent of Ak-Sar-Ben into the broad field of business competition. No man has ever been known to turn back. Once a knight, always a knight, is not spoken in jest. It is an aphorism of as true application as when first uttered by the great author.

upon your pate. You look around you to see what your next neighbor thinks he seems to feel and see and you behold him so absolutely lost in the same conviction which has seized you that he is positively wiping his brow, in the vain certainty that he is being bathed in the nectar of the gods.

"Abash," you say; "be on these mocking men, who would fain accuse a king or his knight. What, ho, must Ak-Sar-Ben or his exalted counsel be profaned in this wise; that they or either of them would thus violate the sanctity of a scene so solemn? 'Tis not water, sure, you say say."

Perchance thou shalt glance e'en to thy next, next neighbor. Him you see mopping his head and brow and turning up his coat collar.

'Tis but coarse jesting these culprits do," you say. "I am here; I have a head, a brow. Can I not feel?"

But you do your neighbor wrong. He, no more than you, believes he is getting soaked; he's just turning up his coat collar and mopping himself off because, like you, he is spellbound with the prodigious eloquence flowing like sylvan waters from the fountain of this man's mouth.

And when you wake up— But you never wake up. You live over and over and over again this sweet, happy dream, this delirium of joy and you know then, for the first time, the full meaning of knighthood in the court of Ak-Sar-Ben. It all bursts in upon you like an avalanche down a mountain side into the door of the old miner's cabin and you realize then, as you could not before, that "It is good for me to have been here."

No wonder Ak-Sar-Ben succeeds, no wonder the kingdom of Quivera flourishes, no wonder great crops and great crops only, have blessed the subjects of this realm for thirteen long years!

This is the ceremony performed to make you a knight; this is the crucible through which you pass that burns off the barnacles and makes you a booster.



MEASURING RECRUIT FOR HIS BRASS BUTTONS.



QUARTET AND BAND WHO FURNISHED THE MUSIC AT THE DEN.