

Tired Business Men of the Campus

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Being a defense of Greek Letters for Go Getters — How our college fraternities have outwitted the faculty, circumvented the higher learning, and made university life the best of all business success schools

THE Greek language has very nearly passed out of our American colleges, except for the alphabet. But the alphabet flourishes exceedingly. Every freshman learns his letters in that ancient tongue — learns them from handsome brass plates which adorn magnificent mansions, and from resplendent jeweled pins on the waistcoats of magnificent young men who issue forth from the mansions to rule the college scene.

The fraternities, in whose nomenclature the alphabet of Plato survives among us, have long been a subject of controversy. Their members — those fine young men with the jeweled pins — will tell you they are temples of a mystical brotherhood. But there are others who whisper — or sometimes shout — that they are rather schools of snobbishness and parking space for lounge lizards. What is the truth?

And, further, what is the significance of this impressive institution, the fraternity, with respect to the colleges in whose shadow it has grown up and prospered so mightily? Within

recent years the college itself has become nearly as controversial a topic as the fraternity. Is there any connection between the two controversies?

In my opinion the connection is fundamental, so that the two subjects can most profitably be discussed together.

FUNDAMENTALLY, the local chapters of the Greek letter fraternities are what college officers call "living groups". As such they are classified with the college dormitories. In effect, indeed, the chapter houses constitute important additions to the dormitory facilities. From one-third to two-thirds of the total enrollment may be housed in this way. These houses constitute one of the gifts which these modern Greeks have brought to the colleges.

But the fraternities differ from other living groups in that membership is attainable only by invitation, and it may be worth while to consider the criteria by which certain freshmen are selected for the privileges of fraternity membership, while the rest are relegated to the outer darkness of

dormitories and other rented rooms.

In "rushing" a freshman, fraternities take account of four principal points: money; family; the preparatory school which the rushee has attended; and personal qualities.

I HAVE listed these points in climactic order. Money is the least considered of the four; the possession of sufficient funds is essential, but beyond that unimportant. The boy with the largest roll and the handsomest motor car in the whole class may be left out. Family is somewhat more heavily weighted; if a boy's father is a man of mark in his home town, and his mother a social leader there, his chances are good. As to the preparatory school, please let no one suppose that scholastic standards are weighed. The point in question is exclusively the social reputation of the school; this third criterion is merely supplemental to that of family.

But the most interesting criterion is the fourth: personal qualities. These are of two kinds. One kind relates to "personality". If a lad has an agreeable exterior, a winning smile, and a pleasing manner, if he is a "slick dresser" and a "smooth talker", and if he is duly accredited as to purse, progenitors, and preparatory school, he is sure to be taken. Nay, if his "slickness" and "smoothness" are exactly right, he will get in despite serious deficiencies in one or more of the other items. On the other hand, if he is notably deficient in "personality", notorious millions and Mayflower ancestry and New England's most famous Eton all combined may fail to land him safely. The second kind of personal qualifications consists of capacities, reported or dis-

played, for distinction in outside activities — athletics, the glee club, the annual comic opera, or even college journalism. Where any such capacity is definitely present, many other things may be overlooked.

From the foregoing account it will be seen that fraternities consist of very agreeable, personable young men, living together most comfortably, and devoting themselves chiefly to athletics and other outside activities — with, of course, some incidental attention to studies.

I HAVE kept away from the subject of studies as long as possible, but one cannot (as yet) avoid it entirely in discussing the life of college students. So I find myself face to face with the problem of explaining as fairly as I can the attitude of the fraternities and of most fraternity men toward studies and scholarship.

Fraternities are officially interested in this matter to the extent of seeing to it that their members "stay in college", and also that they "keep off probation" (because a student "placed on probation" is usually debarred from participation in athletics and other outside activities). To this end most chapters enforce a rule requiring their freshmen to "stay in" for four nights each week. And even a sophomore or an upperclassman who is notoriously delinquent in his studies may be labored with by the head of the house, especially if he is prominent in athletics or some other activity — in an effort, of course, to keep him eligible to remain in residence and to continue his contribution to the glory of the chapter through his extracurricular achievements.

Beyond this point one cannot truth-

fully say that the fraternities in general concern themselves with scholastic matters. Occasionally there is a group which strives to win the scholarship cup or other trophy which is often offered to the fraternity having the highest scholarship average. But it is the consensus of opinion among the fraternities that such distinction is pale and of little real importance to the chapter which attains it. At every college, to be sure, there are regularly a few fine scholars in the fraternity group—to whom their chapters, when reminded of this aspect of collegiate life, will point with pride. But these men are in fraternities almost in spite of, certainly not on account of, their intellectual abilities and attainments. In every fraternity house I ever visited the whole atmosphere and spirit is definitely non-intellectual. The recognized, accepted topics of conversation in these houses are invariably athletics, other outside activities, and girls, and any theme which could by any stretch of language be classified as intellectual or “high-brow” is taboo—socially incorrect.

Is not this fact a curious and interesting one to be predicated of specially selected groups of young men who are supposed to be devoting their lives for the time being to the higher learning?

SOME may suppose that the foregoing exposition is intended as an “indictment” of fraternities, that the facts presented support the charges of idleness and frivolity which are sometimes made, the lounge lizard view. But that view is entirely erroneous. The fraternities do harbor a few lounge lizards, but not many, and they do not want them. The occasional lounge

lizard is no more typical than the sporadic Phi Bete.

Fraternity men in general are exceedingly industrious. Most of them work night and day, week in and week out. They have their classes to go to and their lessons to be got (after a fashion), as the necessary price of continuance in college, and these things take quite a lot of time, at least during certain weeks immediately preceding quizzes and final examinations. And then, over and above this, they have their all-important outside activities to keep up. They have to play on teams, to practice for the glee club and the band, to get up theatricals, to publish various periodicals, to organize meetings, to give dances and banquets, to sit on numberless boards and committees, and so on, almost without end. Idle? Believe me, it is rather “the strenuous life”.

MOREOVER, these multifarious outside activities are educational in a very high degree. The students themselves realize this fact and insist upon it, with an almost pathetic insistence, to the usually deaf ears of deans and professors. Indeed these students maintain that their own activities are more important educationally than their studies—that they, in their own phrase, “get more out of them”, more training of mind and character than their books afford.

We may say, of course, that these young undergraduates are not competent to judge the comparative educational values of activities and book-learning. But as alumni later, having tested their training in the hard post-graduate school of business life, they express no regrets and no change of view. They still maintain, years after-

ward, that in giving preference while in college to activities rather than studies they chose the better part. And the acid test of their sincerity in such expressions comes when they send sons to college and are openly more concerned that the boy should "make" a fraternity and a team, should become a "student leader", than that he should pay any particular attention to books.

In short, the great majority of fraternity men—though they give only the compulsory minimum of attention to those aspects of higher education which are represented by the faculty and the curriculum—are neither idle nor frivolous. They are earnestly at work on another course of training, devised and developed by themselves, which they select for its superior educational advantages.

Personally, I have become convinced that they are right, that their claims are sound, that their choice is justified—for themselves and the very large number of present day collegians whom they represent.

OBVIOUSLY, however, these students with their self-devised course of training, consisting of outside activities, stand for a conception of higher education quite different from the traditional idea with which the curriculum and the labors of professors are associated.

The older type of higher education relied almost exclusively on one instrumentality, namely, learning—book-learning. It assumed that young men who came to college desired this thing called learning and had some use for it; that they had the capacity for getting out of books not only facts but general ideas, conceptions, points of

view, attitudes of mind, even emotions; that, consequently, they could be trained by this instrument of book-learning, their minds developed, their characters molded; that they could be taught a critical analysis of ideas, logical reasoning, æsthetic appreciation, ethical evaluation, and the like.

THIS assumption was probably true of most of the students who went to our American colleges a hundred years ago; and we must not overlook the fact that it is true today of a considerable number of our present students. But within the last forty years our colleges have been invaded by the whole populace, as it were. They have come to enroll practically all the sons (and daughters) of those numerous citizens who in this prosperous land are able to purchase bachelor's degrees for their children. The number of these children registered in our colleges today runs to something like eight hundred thousand. Clearly no such enormous group of young people can be capable of profiting by the old type of higher education. It is quite inconceivable—and very likely it would be undesirable—that any such proportion of the total youthful population should be bookishly inclined to the degree that the old instrument—book-learning—demands.

There are really a great many, to be sure, whom the old education does fit, who do have the necessary aptitudes. Let me insist on this; for I do not wish to be pessimistic or cynical. They come—these *bona fide* young intellectuals—from all walks of life and all grades of society. Never before or elsewhere have the treasures and pleasures of the higher learning been dispensed to so large a propor-

tion of those young citizens who have intellectual propensities.

But the great majority of the new hordes are simply nonplussed and bewildered by the higher learning — and intolerably bored. They can read, of course. They can learn facts and parrot them back to professors in recitations and quizzes, but as for getting any real understanding or appreciation of literature, history, mathematics, or science — it just is not in them. They simply are not “intellectuals” — not “highbrows”. In fact, they would repel such epithets with scorn. But to get any real education from the old instrument — the higher learning — you need to be an “intellectual” and a “highbrow”. There is no training of either intelligence or character to be got from books or studies unless you love these things, unless they absorb you, move you, carry you away.

IF ANYONE had foreseen the intolerable situation in which the majority of the new collegians would find themselves, he might have wondered, with some anxiety, what they would do. They might have sunk into mere apathetic idleness and loafing. A considerable number did and do; these constitute the most difficult “cases” a college officer encounters. Or they might have sought the distractions of vice. Some did and do. But the great majority did and do neither of these things. They are energetic — tremendously so; they are, on the whole, clean and wholesome; and, while they are distinctly not “intellectual,” they are intelligent enough in their own way, that is, in “practical” matters, in running around and doing things. So they seized upon the rudimentary

outside activities which were to be found in the colleges forty years ago and have developed them to the tremendous proportions which they bear on every campus today. And the fraternities, though not solely responsible for this development, became in fact — because they were such convenient organized centers to work from — their most efficient promoters and deserve the greater part of the credit.

In the beginning, the fraternity men and others were merely turning in desperation to something which they could do with some self-felt interest. They did not, of course, deliberately set out to create a new instrument of education. But that is what they have achieved — as they themselves now perceive and maintain.

LET us consider the nature and results of this new brand of higher education. It cannot be asserted that it seeks or attains quite the same goals as the older instrument, learning. Among the older objectives I have previously mentioned the critical analysis of ideas, logical reasoning, æsthetic appreciation, and ethical evaluation. The young men here in question are not capable of these things. What they admire and wish to emulate are those qualities of character and mind which make for practical “success” in the adult world of business and organizations: such moral qualities as the fighting spirit, the will-to-win, initiative, and energy; and such intellectual capacities as are involved in meeting and dealing with other people and planning and organizing. They perceive clearly enough that these are the qualities and capacities which will bring jobs and promotion. And they

perceive also that in the mimic business world of college activities, with its politics and intrigues, its tremendous setting up of machinery and organization, its multiplicity of practical things to be done, they have an almost perfect school for the "go-getter" — which is exactly what they aspire to become.

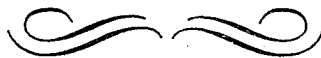
As I said before, they are quite right. They have found a new instrument of education, admirably adapted to their purposes and capacities; and with all the energy of ambitious youth they proceed to train themselves therewith, disregarding so far as practicable the obstructive curriculum still sponsored by the faculties but designed for other purposes and capacities than theirs.

In short, our colleges are no longer homogeneous as to constituency or as to the kind of education they afford, but are serving two quite different groups: a minority who are intellectually gifted and carry on the older collegiate tradition, working with the faculties at intellectual tasks, towards intellectual and spiritual goals; and a large majority who are avowedly non-intellectual, for whom the old objectives are impossible and the old methods meaningless, but who are eagerly pursuing a new kind of training splendidly adapted to their own purposes and abilities.

The fraternities have become the stronghold and chief agency of the new majority education. This new pedagogical instrument is their great and significant gift to the colleges.

It is true, of course, that this major gift may be regarded as dangerous from the standpoint of the older tradition. The social dominance of the fraternities on every campus, combined with their natural disregard for book-learning, as a thing merely incidental, or even antagonistic, to their own purposes and efforts, tends to weaken that older tradition even in the minds of those students who are capable of profiting by it. But doubtless this scarcely avoidable injury to the minority is more than compensated by the great benefits afforded to the majority.

FINALLY, this exposition should set at rest the charges so frequently made that the fraternities are "undemocratic." The fact is that the fraternities are the refuge of what we may call the intellectual proletariat. It is largely through their efforts that our colleges are now devoted predominantly to the democratic object of training practical business men, rather than to the mere advancement of learning and what used to be called "culture" among a selected few who happen to be intellectually gifted.



Madame Arrives in Politics

BY EUNICE FULLER BARNARD

After "lingering on the brink" for eight years, the matronhood of America puts boldly out to leadership in public and party affairs

POLITICS, my grandmother used to tell me, was rather shady business. It consisted of deals carried on by more or less undesirable men behind closed doors. The best men seldom mixed in it. When one did, such as George Washington or Daniel Webster, it was no longer politics but statesmanship.

Statesmanship, however, dealt with such abstruse matters as tariffs and monetary standards, of little interest or concern to women. In neither politics nor statesmanship obviously would any right-minded woman think of taking part. In one case she would be soiling her hands. In the other she would be meddling in affairs with which she was not qualified to deal. If by some fluke outside of nature's plan woman should some time be given the vote, her whole duty would be to use it wisely to the glory of God and the Republican party.

My grandmother was a New Englander. So was my other grandmother, who was brought up in the philosophic shadow of Concord. She believed that women were as capable of intelligent voting as men. In the quiet of her own soul she may even have imagined the

time when some good woman might sit in the United States Senate, arguing in a dignified, persuasive way for temperance or the abolition of child labor. But even she, I am sure, never envisioned women in "politics". There would have been something repugnant to her in the thought.

Yet I believe that were my grandmothers alive and only fifty years old today, they would both have hearty political interests, and that one of them, probably the former, would be working in the present Presidential campaign. For it is exactly this conservative, middle-aged type of woman who today in a different era, far more experienced and worldly-wise, has risen easily and naturally to the political saddle.

POLITICS, I believe the current campaign has demonstrated, is one of the most congenial occupations in the world to the mature, leisure-class American woman whose children are grown and who is looking about for a new outlet for her energies. Once the old-time stigma and the strangeness have been dispelled, once her help is acclaimed by the men, as it has been