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A PLEA FOR COLLEGE FRATERNITIES.

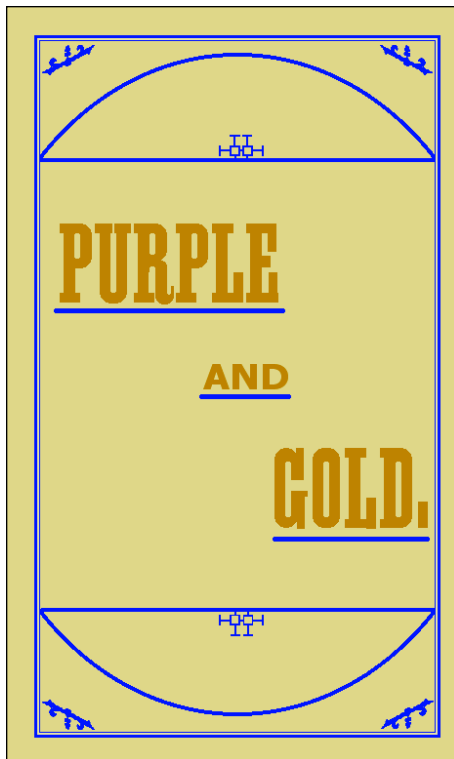
Hon. ELBRIDGE T. GERRY, PRESIDENT OF THE CHI PSI FRATERNITY.

College life has ceased in this country to be regarded as a mere episode in a young man's existence. Severed for four years from the ties of home, from the restraints of parental influence, and from the advantages of the social relations of the household, it is universally conceded that these years have more to do with developing the character than those spent in either previous or subsequent education. Friendships formed in college and the influences to which young men are there subjected shape their future lives for good or evil. It is there that the character is moulded, the education is practically completed, and the future usefulness of the man when he graduates from the institution is determined. The result does not depend on the mere educational part of the course. Proficiency in study is but a slight factor in the insuring of future success in life. It is worthy of note, that comparatively few who graduate at the head of their class attain in after life to the prominence of those who took even a secondary part in the ranks at the time of graduation. Many students who exhibit great literary merit, unusual perseverance, and often marked ability during their college course, fail utterly when brought in contact with the world at large, and often are never heard of after receiving the first academic honors in the power of the institution to bestow. This is a matter which concerns every parent having the welfare of his son at heart. Men are naturally proud of the proficiency exhibited by their children during their

"A Plea for College Fraternities" was the lead article in the inaugural issue of The Purple and Gold in November 1883 (a reproduction of that issue's cover is shown at the left). This essay remains a classic statement of the college fraternity's role in American education.

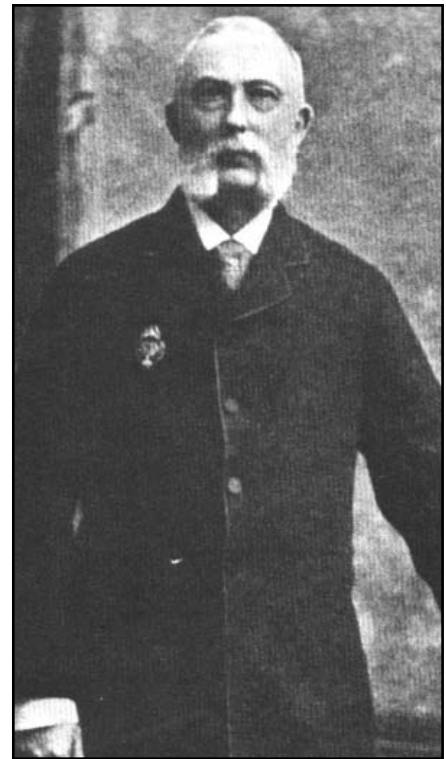
Brother Gerry recognized that while the college years are the most influential part of a man's life, colleges and universities are ill-equipped to develop character, promote friendships, or instill values. The influence of professors is confined to the classroom, and college administrators have little interest in the student's welfare so long as he passes his classes and obeys college regulations. Colleges cannot replace the home and family from which the student is removed during his college years.

The Fraternity fills this void, Brother Gerry argues. The Fraternity embodies the age-old tendency of men to join together in formal associations which create ties so deep, precious and enduring that they are extended to a chosen few, distinguished from the general public by their personal qualities. The bonds of fraternity into which these men enter foster among them a positive sense of group identity and mutual responsibility which transcends the relationship of mere classmates.



The Cover of the first issues of the P&G

Elbridge T. Gerry, Zeta 1857, author of "A Plea for College Fraternities," was President of Chi Psi from 1882 to 1914, and was grandson of that Elbridge Gerry who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was the embodiment of Fraternity loyalty. Said a writer in The Purple and Gold in 1888: "His Chi Psi life has always been an active one. He declared the principle that Chi Psi recognized no dividing line between college days and active life, that it never dies, and most steadfastly has he preached and practiced it ... He is a very mine of Fraternity symbolism and heraldry, and the Historian [Gerry] will find, stored away in his memory, a thousand and one facts not recorded and doubtless forgotten by others ... In his private relations with members of the Fraternity, the same great interest in the welfare of each integral part of our Brotherhood is manifest."



Elbridge T. Gerry, Zeta 1857, #7, 1882-1914

A Plea for College Fraternities

Hon. Elbridge T. Gerry, President of the Chi Psi Fraternity

College life has ceased in this country to be regarded as a mere episode in a young man's existence. Severed for four years from the ties of home, from the restraints of parental influence, and from the advantages of the social relations of the household, it is universally conceded that these years have more to do with developing the character than those spent in either previous or subsequent education.

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This is a matter which concerns every parent having the welfare of his son at heart. Men are naturally proud of the proficiency exhibited by their children during their college life; but they are still more interested in having them succeed in the life which lies beyond com-

mencement-day — a term aptly used to indicate that the work in college is intended only as a foundation of the structure to be built by the subsequent career of the graduating student.

Our American colleges differ widely from those in Europe in this, that the undergraduates are far younger than those who undergo the European course. And the result is, that our American youth are subjected at an earlier age than in Europe to the temptations, the influences, and the advantages which attend the academic career.

Our best colleges are located in certain well-known places, and have derived celebrity not simply from their age, but from the past records of the men whom they have educated, and the results which they have accomplished. Hence, the students matriculate from every portion of the country, and it is not uncom-

mon to find those who are born at one end of the Union being educated at a prominent institution located in the opposite direction. This necessarily results in a complete severance from the home circle and its ties during the academic career.

Now what does the college do to supply the place of home? So far as the institution itself is concerned, practically it really does nothing. It may furnish commons, so to speak, in the way of board and lodging, but the labors of the professors are chiefly confined to the lecture-room, and as for the trustees of the college, they do not concern themselves very materially about the care of the students, so long as the latter fulfill the requirements of the faculty in their recitations and proficiency, their private life receives no attention whatever, unless it infringes on the police regulations of the college.

And the result naturally is, that left to themselves, they are compelled to form their own friendships, to select their own acquaintances, and to enjoy themselves as best they may in the absence of home, they being for the time, as it were, strangers in a foreign land. This is no idle theory or fanciful conjecture. Ask any student and he will verify these assertions. Cross-examine any college official and they will be reluctantly admitted to be accurate.

It is hardly necessary to say that time has demonstrated that friendships formed in college continue during after life. On the selection of these friends and the character of the friendships then, depends in no small degree the character of the student who forms them. "A man," says the old proverb, "is known by the company he keeps," and it is lamentably true that "evil communications corrupt good manners."

No parent of judgement will recommend his son entering a college to select his friends indiscriminately. Only those whose habits,

social relations, intellect and judgement comport with the young man's own position and tend to his future welfare are desirable. And then the question arises, "How is he to select these?" "What course shall he adopt in making that selection?" "What guarantee is there of the stability of the friendships thus created?"

In all ages of the world the relation of friendship among men has been deemed so sacred and so enduring that the details of the bond which constitutes the relation are not to be exhibited in the vulgar gaze. Holy Writ records many instances of such friendship and affection, without stating the cause of the reasons which led either to its creation or continuance. And strange as it may seem, hardly any religion in the world has existed without containing within its pale and among its most efficient advocates and workers those who were united by some confidential, secret tie.

Thus, for instance, in classic Greece, the mysteries of Eleusis, as they have been but vaguely disclosed, intimate the existence of such a relation. Egypt, one of the oldest of the nations, was famed for her symbolisms of secrecy, indicated but faintly in the hieroglyphics which adorn her works of art, and which have remained for thousands of years indicative of the endurance of her history, and of their attraction for her people who now live only in the records of the past.

Even in the earlier days of Christianity, the curious symbolisms found in the catacombs - notably so in the beautiful ideas embodied in the *icqmz* which mark the sepulture of the ancient martyr and his faith in Christ, followed by the grand old records of the early orders of knighthood, created for the purpose of rescuing the Holy City from the dominion of the Infidel, only a trace of which exists at the present time in the modern masonic fraternity, - tend to show that there are

ties not properly the subject of inquiry to the vulgar, and too deep and enduring a character to be disclosed excepting to those qualified by education, intellect or proper natural qualities to receive and appreciate them.

And hence it is, that in a less degree there have sprung up within the past century in this country, comparatively one of the new nations of the earth, a series of fraternities, or secret organizations, among college students, whereby some are chosen out of the many from their peculiar characteristics or qualities, as the tried friends of each other, and those on whom each member can rely as disinterested in his friendship, judicious in his counsel, discreet in his advice, and beneficial in his influence and deportment.

The oldest of these fraternities was originated with the element of literary merit as its characteristic and essential part, but it was not long before it was discovered that something more was required than mere intellectuality to constitute an intimacy between young men. While there is much to admire in the development of the brain and in the pre-eminence which intellect in this country gives to its possessor, yet it is not always those who are the most erudite scholars, or the most zealous students, who are the most agreeable companions or the most desirable friends.

There is, to a certain degree, a sort of crystallization of the social powers as the sequence of intellectual development, and those whose time is consecrated to arduous works of the brain, too often become crystallized, as it were, in the discharge of their duties, are absorbed in their literary pursuits and care for nothing unless it is in some way connected with the life which they lead.

Hence it was not long before other fraternities were founded, having their object the creation of a

more intimate relation than one founded on literary merit alone; and prominent among these stands Chi Psi Fraternity, which owed its creation to a number of young men in Union College, in the year 1841. Many of these have passed away, but the fraternity which they founded shows today by its coherence that they did their work well, and that the principles which were molded by them, embodying the requirements of admission to the rights of brotherhood, were correct, steadfast and enduring.

Since then, numberless other fraternities have sprung up, and exist today in almost every college in the Union. Some of them are characterized by the number of students they receive; other by the proficiency of their members in their studies; and others again, by the prominence of their social relations and popularity on the score of intellectual ability or personal talent. There are a few whose sole purpose and object is frivolous dissipation.

Of course the student who enters college is often beset with difficulty in the way of selecting his associates. Too often an effort is made to secure his entrance into a fraternity by its members simply for the purpose of swelling its numbers, by adding his name to its roll. And hence it behooves the student to ascertain for himself whether those who constitute the chapter are those whom he desires to number for life among his personal friends.

Properly used and judiciously exerted, the power of the fraternal bond soon becomes apparent. Its members stand ready to assist each other when in doubt of trouble, and the academic success of one reflects credit on the whole chapter. As the latter comprises members of all the college classes, the youngest member profits by the wisdom and experience of the elder; and thus the intimacy pervades the entire college community, differing in this respect from the friendships of mere class-

mates, few of whom excel the other in either age or experience.

The faculty and trustees of the college often through ignorance or prejudice endeavor injudiciously to interfere with the existence of these useful societies. Whenever this is successfully done, as unhappily has been the case in some of our most prominent colleges, the results show that after the student graduates, apart from a vague general sense of gratitude for the benefit which he is supposed to have derived from his college courses, there is little to unite him to his earlier acquaintances, still less to remind him of his college days gone by, as he grows older, and nothing to keep alive his interest in an institution which, while it may be perfect as a seminary of learning, has deprived him for four years of the advantages of his home without presenting anything but a dry education in return.

And this is one of the reasons why previous to the existence of these fraternities so little was done by post graduates in the way of donations or bequests to their Alma Mater. Once severed from the routine of college life, the duties of the outer world are all absorbing, and unless a tie is created which the commencement day does not sever, the interest of the graduate soon becomes chilled and lessened as time rolls on and other cares and duties engross his attention.

It is a pity that the professors and trustees of our colleges do not wake up to this fact and swallow their prejudices, to the pecuniary benefit, at all events, of their institution. Facts are not wanting to sustain the assertion. Only recently in New York City a young man, who was prominently connected while in Columbia College with one of her fraternities, died leaving the whole of his enormous fortune to the institution. Trustees of sister colleges who insist on the suppression of fraternities, but who do not object to increasing the resources of their

corporation, will do well to look into this.

So, too, parents ought to examine this subject seriously, before permitting their sons to enter colleges, and again before encouraging them either to pledge themselves or to become members of college fraternities. They should first carefully examine the printed catalogues and records of the latter and see for themselves who the men are, that in their day and generation founded and adorned the fraternity, and who are the present members with whom, were they still in college, they would prefer to associate or to have their sons associate as close and intimate friends.

It is idle to suppose that the professors or trustees of a college will attend to these matters. As a general rule, they care nothing about them. Possibly they may recommend or encourage some mere literary society, as a sort of mental relaxation for students, but too often they prefer to have the students severed, as it were, from every possible tie, in order that they may be under the eye of the faculty, like mere school boys, kept in terror by the threat of the rod. Bear in mind that school and college are totally different institutions. In school, study is a matter of routine; in college, life is the subject of education. Turn a collegian into a school boy, and you have as a result an intellectual automation; transform a school boy, and you begin his development as a man. With the school boy there is no responsibility; with the college student, he must think and act for himself. The wise will do well to consider this matter, and those who have yet to learn the advantages of the fraternal tie, will find in the education of their offspring a practical illustration of the necessity of its creation, propriety of its encouragement, and the advantages which are its results, when that tie is properly formed and judiciously cemented.