

THE FRATERNITY MAN AND

THE NON-FRATERNITY MAN

The following sketches were written for the Rainbow, a fraternity publication, by men, who have achieved success since they left college. These little articles contain good words of advice, for both fraternity and non-fraternity men. They seem particularly applicable to life at the university of Nebraska, so they are given below.

I.

The Editor of the Rainbow has asked me, as a non-fraternity man to say a few words that may help a little toward relieving the embarrassment that often exists between the members of secret societies and their uninitiated friends. I am not at all sure that it can be wholly removed. Much of it arises from the natural and, so far as I can see, necessary conditions that prevail. No such embarrassment is felt after college life between members of the great secret orders and non-members. I have never joined any of these organizations, yet it never enters my thought in dealing with a man to notice whether he be a mason or not. But the world is a very different place from the college hall, and the members of these organizations are men, while active fraternity members and non-members are, in a certain sense, not yet men but belong to that unique category of the human family—College students.

If you will allow me frankly to analyze my own embarrassment in dealing with fraternity men I think we can get at the matter more simply and correctly. My parents were bitterly opposed to the fraternity system and, while in academic work, I myself had imbibed from some of my associates a strong feeling, possibly of prejudice, against them. This would probably have kept me from accepting an invitation to join a fraternity; and, perhaps, my own principles had something to do with the fact I did not receive that invitation, though with the more accurate self-knowledge that comes with years I suspect that there may have been reasons less complimentary to myself. However, the fact that I had not had an opportunity to join was, I believe, the main source of my embarrassment. Rightly or wrongly, in many cases, it must have been the latter, there was always the feeling, a sort of sub-consciousness never fairly put into words and admitted to myself, that these men looked upon me as one below their standard. I felt too, that if I were not careful they would think I was anxious for an invitation to join. The fraternity seemed to constitute a sort of college aristocracy, and, while the standards of admission were as diverse as the poles, one fraternity always recognized members of another as fellow aristocrats. I now recognize that this must have been grossly unjust to many, perhaps to most of the fraternity men; yet the feeling was real to me and to others.

Now what can be done to bridge this gulf? I recognize fully that in a large college it is not practicable that every deserving man should have a chance to join a fraternity you will thus have to admit with me that this limitation must necessarily tend to establish a caste line, and I am very sure that a caste line cannot exist anywhere, and especially in college life, without some sensitiveness on the part of the one left out. Nor need this sensitiveness arise from a feeling of envy; it may be simply the assertion of one's own self-respect. With this clearly in mind, it only remains for me to ask that you make this caste line as little apparent as possible. Let the non-fraternity man feel that the limitations of your choice have not arisen from unfriendliness, but simply from the necessity of the case. He has a circle of friends and you in your fraternity have yours, but neither should be allowed to feel that this circle of friends includes all that are worth having. In this, it seems to me the fraternity man should take the initiative. It will require great tact and consideration; but I believe the difficulty can be largely surmounted and that the resulting good feeling would make it worth while. One final word; make the non-fraternity man feel, if possible, that you value him as much as you would if he were a member of some other fraternity. That after all is very near the heart of the matter and would work toward a gracious solution.

II.

I have cheerfully accepted the kind invitation to me as a non-fraternity man to "point out the changes in the action and sentiment of fraternity men that would make the system less embarrassing to that fine large class of men who do not join." Inasmuch as several years have elapsed since I left college I find myself somewhat out of touch though not out of sympathy, with college life. But my memory is fairly good along the line of thought which is proposed.

My first suggestion would be that fraternity men avoid any unnecessary appearance of secrecy. Doubtless the average fraternity man has fewer real secrets than his non-fraternity brother often imagines. Yet it is easy for fraternity men to congregate together outside of their hall and talk in whispers, when perhaps the subject for discussion is one that they would willingly announce to the world. The natural curiosity of the

human heart chafes under the notice of these subdued conversations. Thus if the public parade of secrecy could be diminished or eliminated, it would be a great stride toward the goal of harmony.

Then too, I would suggest that fraternity men should avoid the appearance of narrowed sympathy. Where men are bound together by obligations and congenial companionship in secret organizations they are apt to lose much of their interest in those outside of their circle. Even men by nature of broad sympathies soon find themselves yielding to this tendency. Non-fraternity men notice this very quickly. I recall more than a few instances where men were admired by all because of their broad sympathies, yet on entering a fraternity a marked change came over them in this regard. These, however, were exceptional cases; yet in general, fraternity men should show a wider sociability.

I do not say that fraternity men should give the same proportionate time and attention to non-fraternity men as to their own fraternity members. I am speaking more now of their attitude than of their action. There are countless opportunities in college life where fraternity men can prove their sociability to the non-fraternity men without loss. Such a course would greatly reduce animosities and misunderstandings.

Sociability is an effectual lubricator and will reduce friction. A great part of men's bitterness and jealousy towards each other arises from misunderstandings rather than from real grievances. Separation only increases, while association generally decreases, such unpleasant relations.

Finally, I would suggest to both members and non-members that men be promoted to college honors only on merit. Both classes need this suggestion. It is not needful to say which have been the greatest offenders. A class or society orator is to be elected—each fraternity feels a pride in having the honor, and the temptation is strong to push the candidacy of one of their own members. This surely should not be done unless it is plainly a case of merit. If fraternities would inflexibly maintain such a rule of promotion only for merit, they would again take a long step towards the solution of the problem for which this article is written.

In closing I wish to say that many of my best and even intimate college friends were fraternity men. I sincerely trust that nothing I have written will be construed as hinting at my personal grievances of my college life. I have written sincerely, frankly, and kindly, and I hope my suggestions may be received in the same friendly spirit.

III.

Although the writer was a non-fraternity man throughout his college course, he could never quite appreciate the justice which many maintained that there was in taboos fraternities, and in insisting that the whole Greek-letter system be dispatched "to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns." To the writer there was a certain mysterious charm about the subject that made it not only attractive but extremely fascinating; and he believes that truth, if it should speak, would say that many of those who are loudest in their anathemas against secret societies have but one reason for their abusive epithets, viz., they are jealous and disappointed because they are not invited to become members. No person, however brilliant, if he harbor personal grievance, can criticize with any thing like fairness the fraternity system. On the other hand, it is equally true that though a fraternity "be as chaste as ice and as pure as snow it shall not 'escape calumny'."

From the writer's observation, however, it would appear that for the most part, fraternity men allow too sharp a line to be drawn between themselves and non-members. They hold themselves too much aloof and seem clamorous in public. Non-members often are allowed to feel that they are not quite as good as the frat boys are, which is certainly a very great reproach on the gentility of men who because of some superiority are selected by the chapters out of the student body to become members. Outside of college the true gentleman is he who makes others, even his inferiors, feel comfortable in his presence. Why should less be expected of him who joins a college fraternity?

Doubtless another reason for the friction that exists between members and non-members is that fraternities often take the reins of power into their own hands. College politics, college publications, college bookstores and the like are too often managed largely, if not entirely, by and for fraternity men. This is not as it should be, and is bound to breed contention. Of all communities in this terrestrial sphere the college community ought to be the most thoroughly democratic; and when fraternities awake to this fact, concede it, and act accordingly, there will be practically no longer any cause for strife; and with the cause removed all unfriendly feeling will pass away.

So far what has been said is general and applies for the most part to all chapters alike at the college in mind. There are, however, certain minor obstacles which might readily be removed but

which now stand in the way of a better relation between the two classes of collegians. The writer would lay down the general principle that anything which tends to embarrass a non-member tends also to strain the relation between the two. Therefore we would respectfully suggest that members refrain from all excessive exhibitions of fraternal love in the presence of non-members; also that they wear the society badge in some modest place where it can be seen, if they choose, but not where it will stare non-members in the face and constantly remind them of the existing barrier.

At the university which I have especially in thought, the greatest embarrassment comes to the non-member on class-day, when he realizes that he has no place to take his mother, his sister, or his fiancée. His guests do not understand what it means not to be a fraternity man, and quite naturally they ask him why he does not take them to the grand-stand or into the social gatherings. What can he say? To the writer it would seem that no greater opportunity offers itself for fraternities to close the gap that exists, than to arrange their class-day festivities so that every college man may have a share in them—and thus be allowed that happy satisfaction of feeling himself not ostracized but admitted to the best that there is. As it now is only a few non-members attend the receptions, the greater number being not invited. Why could not the various chapters agree upon some plan whereby each member of the college should receive two tickets for at least one spread? Some such little courtesy shown by the societies would do a great deal toward putting an end to campus feuds and make Greek-letter fraternities popular among non-fraternity men.

The writer has given his views based upon his own observations. He has not intended to be other than friendly in his criticism. He believes college societies are grand good institutions for the fortunate fellows who belong, but he deplores the fact that they often bring embarrassment to such as are not members. Perhaps the above suggestions can be read and do no harm; he hopes they will do some good.

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