

## A FIRESIDE CHAT BEFORE INITIATION

It is indeed a singular honor for me to have the opportunity to chat with you at such an important moment in your life thus far in the fraternity. Sitting here together reminds me of the rather stirring picture, which I remember from my pledge-ship days from the Pledge Manual, of the mature, wise, and successful President of the Illinois Central Railroad, Lawrence A. Downs (Delta Delta, 1894), drawn by his Sigma Chi Brother, John T. McCutcheon (Delta Delta, 1889), an inspired and famous cartoonist of the Chicago Tribune. The <sup>picture</sup> shows him talking to the young men gathered around the huge fireplace at Purdue's Delta Delta chapter house. You pledges are at the threshold of being found worthy for initiation into our great fraternity. "To be initiated" means, of course, to be admitted into a society and to be instructed in certain rudiments and imbued with meaningful principles pertinent to it. But it also means to get something new started, to begin something new, and it is in this sense that my words to you are to be understood.

It has been traditional that a "quiet week" or a period of silence precede your final indoctrination into the fraternity. It is a serious moment, and the important words and vows, that soon will be heard and spoken, will be of life-long duration and importance. To some unfortunate few, such a period of quiet and silence may seem foolish, but quietude is in many ways a positive aid to personal growth. In such a period one can gain from the "still, small voice" insights, outlooks, visions, and inner strengths for oneself and about oneself. We seem today often to be living amidst such haste, bustle, and din, we seem to forget where we are going in life and why. Quietude offers you the opportunity of taking stock of yourself, of looking inward, of asking yourself some pertinent questions. "Who am I, really?" "What do I stand for?" "What do fraternity and brotherhood mean to me?" "Am I a man of good character?" "What kind of a Sigma Chi will I make?" Your answers now may decide much of your future course of action in life.

I am reminded here of a poem I have often read with my students by a nineteenth-century Swiss writer, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (1825-1898), "The Flight of the

Gulls" ("Möwenflug" - 1881). Summarized simply, we see the poet beset with dread as he realizes the unnervingly slight difference existing between reality and pretense, between truth and fraud. He comes to this realization as he observes the magnificently rhythmic and beautiful flight of gulls in the air as they are almost identically and exactly reflected in the mirrored ocean surface below. It is almost difficult to distinguish the real and true flight from the "carbon-copied," deceptive reflection. In interpreting the lesson derived from the flight of the gulls, the poet addresses himself personally as a creative artist but at the same time in reality asks each reader as well: "Are you genuinely, truthfully winged and inspired as the soaring gulls in flight or are you only the pale and illusory reflection mirrored below?" Will you as a Sigma Chi be the real, inspired active member or only a pale "fellow traveler"? The opportunity to make the right decision may not come your way again.

It is not easy to be a Sigma Chi. The world will expect more of you when you "take up the cross," especially the White Cross, and when you carry over its ideals and message into your daily life. You will be required to be more than just a pin-wearer. By your actions, attitudes, behavior, and words you become witnesses for Sigma Chi, and you will daily be judged on the basis of how its ideals and principles are exemplified through you. Unfortunately, some initiates will let themselves fall short of these expectations, when they put down their cross and its symbolic message. Those chosen few who are called to go the way of the White Cross live by different standards, however; they are different and stand out wherever they are. "To take up the White Cross" should not necessarily invoke a dismal picture, as I am reminded constantly at the beautiful church I attend regularly. Here, I clearly find two aspects of the cross visibly present. The first one is the more obvious one, for as one enters the sanctuary with the eyes directed forward to the altar there stands a statue of Christ crucified. This, in a narrow sense, is indeed one aspect of what church membership denotes, but in a broader sense of what membership in Sigma Chi signifies: dedication, demands, discipline, disappointments, duties, grief, obedience, sacrifices, sorrows, the sweat and toil,

in other words, the unpleasant and unpopular aspects. But there is another Christ on the cross higher up in the center of the richly carved rood screen. This shows Christ in quite another pose and mood. He is Christ the King, regal, head erect, self-assured, triumphant, out-going, almost rejoicing. These two aspects of the cross, I have always felt, symbolize our membership in Sigma Chi: if we are willing to accept the obligations it imposes on us, not always pleasurable ones, to be sure, we can look higher and upward and find its rich rewards. So, there is really a double face to our cross of Sigma Chi, a somber one of obligation and a kingly one of happy fellowship. You surely by now have already experienced both in your journey toward your final enlightenment in initiation.

Your presence here at this moment signifies the approaching end of one phase of your life in the fraternity and the beginning of another. You have now progressed toward the end of your pledgship and stand before a much greater, rewarding, and productive beginning of your membership in the fraternity. I hope you have now found a real meaning in your months of pledgship. It has been a period of learning, centered primarily around the "Jordan Standard" and the ideals established by our founders, to which every Sigma Chi should aspire. They were indeed men of good character. The word "character" comes from a Greek word meaning "to stamp, brand, mark, and engrave." The active brothers have tried to imprint upon you certain characteristics and ideals which will serve to distinguish you always as a Sigma Chi. The word "ideal" also comes from a Greek-Latin stem and means a "pattern, standard, image, example, perfection." No one can give you character; you either have it or you don't. But in Sigma Chi we can try to guide you and help you develop certain ideals and attitudes and to think and talk about them and to interpret and assimilate them. Your period of apprenticeship has wanted to educate (Latin: e ducare - "to lead forth, to bring out" of the "darkness" into the light), indoctrinate ("to teach, to instruct"), and lead you gradually step by step, week by week, for a more meaningful understanding of the enlightenment you will receive at the shrine of Sigma Chi and of what will be expected of you after proving yourself worthy of induction.

This entire problem has been exquisitely stated in a ballad which I again often have read in my courses; it is by Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) and is entitled "The Veiled Statue at Sais" ("Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais" - 1795). It tells about an eager and zealous young man who had gone to the ancient capital of Egypt at Sais to become a member of the esoteric order of priests there at the temple of Isis. Easily and quickly he had passed through the first stages of his training, but he was impatient to have revealed to him without further delay the final denouement of the order's secrets and its hidden mysteries. Complaining one day to the hierophant in the temple's rotunda, he wanted to know what was hidden behind the veil that hung draped so delicately around the pedestal in its center. The high priest warned him that the Goddess of Truth and Knowledge was enconced there and that no mortal dare unveil her statue unless his mind had been properly prepared and consecrated to know and to comprehend her nature. That night, after some sleepless hours due to his burning desire to see the final, secret truths hidden from him by the veil, he furtively at midnight stole back to the deadly silence of the darkened rotunda, where the pale light of the moon fell upon the veiled statue. After overcoming some agonizing torments of conscience, the young man does insolently and impetuously pull aside the veil so that he may see revealed the Goddess. We never learn from the poem what the youth saw. Whatever it was, he could barely utter a sound thereafter and soon passed away with grief, shame, and guilt, intimating, however, that whoever hopes to see final truths revealed before he is properly educated to comprehend them, will never gain happiness therefrom.

Your pledgeship in the fraternity and in fact your entire educational experience at the University are aptly comparable to a pilgrimage. To take a pilgrimage implies usually setting off on a long and often tedious course with the hope and faith that when it is over one will attain some benefit, receive something for the expended effort, and reach the set goal. All necessary preparations must be made carefully and thoughtfully. Not too many persons are called upon to make a pilgrimage and of those who do start off, not all arrive at the goals they wanted

to achieve. Even so, the pilgrim's road (and one can experience this today still in many parts of the world) is usually well-marked with signs, directives, and shrines, but unfortunately many pilgrims never see them nor get their message. Others often stray off their course and end up in a dead end or blind alley. Those who reach their goal are changed by the exhilaration of their success; they are transfigured and can now set out into new directions instead of returning over the former route they had once traversed. Each one of you must determine what the goal of your pilgrimage in the fraternity and the University is to be. Will you see the signs and heed the messages and thus be able to rejoice at the end of the journey that will bring you to new fulness of life?

✓ Another illustrative example along these lines comes to mind from my classroom experience and concerns the medieval knight Parsifal as he is portrayed in a famous epic (a novel of development with a quest theme, Parzival) written by Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170-1230). Perhaps you know the version of it as found in Richard Wagner's (1813-1883) opera (1882) of the same name. Parsifal was a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, who as a young man set off on a pilgrimage to find the Castle of the Holy Grail and to become its King. From his childhood as a rather naive lad growing up in the forests to his final and successful quest at the height of his knightly prowess, Parsifal underwent various important stages in his physical, mental, and spiritual development. He had enjoyed every advantage in life. He had mastered the complete know-how as to how to act in every situation according to the accepted codes of knighthood and etiquette: proper manners, proper dress, proper language, proper social graces. On his initial journey to the Grail Castle he overcame a number of obstacles and hurdles and no doubt rightly felt that he had earned the right to be initiated into the Order of Knights of the Holy Grail. It turned out, however, before the rites and ceremonies unfolded completely, that Parsifal flunked, as it were, the final examinations. The deficiency in his education stemmed from the fact that it had been geared only to the externals of life. He had never been forced to look inward, to go through a period of quietude, as it were, to be concerned about anyone or anything beyond his own self-centeredness.

He could not give the proper responses expected of him. He had to leave the Grail Castle, and he cursed his fate, blamed others for his shortcomings, doubted God's goodness, and wandered aimlessly for some years. Finally, Parsifal reached the last step in his education<sup>al</sup> process, and through a wise, mature, and religious relative he was re-educated and made to realize what he had lacked thus far as a knight errant, namely, the proper internal qualities, values, and ideals. His earlier quest had been meaningless and self-seeking, but when he combined and matched his external perfection with the newly acquired higher goals and loftier ideals and a concern for others, he was able to start off on his pilgrimage again to reach the final new stage of his life as the properly qualified King of the Order of Grail Knights. He had discovered now how to give the correct responses as he participated in the rites at the Grail Castle. You as neophytes have obviously had the external advantages of University and fraternity life, but there are deeper and more important meanings you must learn before you can take your seat with your peers.

An integral part of the medieval institution of knighthood was the ceremony when the qualified young nobles were to be inducted into the knightly ranks, somewhat comparable perhaps to a coming-of-age ceremony. The night preceding the initiation ceremony the young nobleman spent alone in prayer and meditation. His sponsor would then attend to his needs in preparation for the ceremony. The height of the solemn service was the presentation of the sword, for it was the one outward symbol of one's new station and rank. It was duly consecrated, and the initiate was then dubbed a knight by an accolade. The word "dub" comes from an Anglo-Saxon word, "dubbian," meaning "to strike or to blow," and the word "accolade" (Latin: ad collum) meaning "to the neck." The noble ideals which the young man had acquired during his education and set up as the inner goals and guides to follow through life were impressed one last time into the consciousness of the neophyte by striking them on the shoulders ("into the neck-head") with the blade of the sword. He emerged indeed a new character, permitted now to bear his own individual sword as a symbol of the ideals he carried in his heart and mind.

There is also a strong similarity between the medieval preparations for the dubbing of a knight and the step by step educational process at the bourgeois level in becoming a master craftsman. The stages of such a youth's maturation were recognized with various ceremonies. The adolescent apprentice, if found worthy by his masters, progressed to the stage of a journeyman, and he acquired a great proficiency in his trade as he wandered from town to town. The eventual goal of being inducted as a master into his chosen profession could be attained by presenting a tangible, perfectly produced object or executed performance representative of the craft. If all oral and written tests, in addition, showed the journeyman worthy of admission to the masters' guild, he then had to endure some often rather severe hazing. By beating the so-called diamond-in-the-rough and thus removing from him any remaining rough exterior reminiscent of the former "raw material," one hoped to fashion him into a smooth, new character. One wanted physically to impress on the candidate's consciousness the approved ideals, conduct, and the rules for one's life and for one's profession. He was then both literally and figuratively cleansed for his fresh, new start in life, also newly shaved and clothed, and finally conducted into the chapter room of the guild house before the beautiful altar for initiation.

One very important and meaningful pause on your present pilgrimage, in order to understand more fully what Sigma Chi is all about, is to hear something about the fraternity's Patron Saint, the Emperor of Ancient Rome, Constantine the Great. One might wonder why a fraternity would have a special patron. Here again we can go back to the beginnings of civilization when even primitive man wanted to find some symbol to which he could turn, for instance, to offer thanks for blessings received. He invented, among others, the God Thor and sacrificed to him for hearth and home and harvests and the God Balder for the beneficent rays of the sun. One wanted to draw strength from some worthy being who had gone before and from whom one could derive inspiration for further emulation. So, it has become quite traditional for all groups, societies, academies, and organizations of all times to set up examples of courage, strength, and wisdom to which its members could aspire

and could regard as mythical founders. Even the German Club reveres the universal wisdom of the authors, Goethe and Schiller. The campus Young Democrats still display prominently the portrait of John F. Kennedy as its model. The Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority has chosen the Goddess Athena as being the one it most reveres and wishes to emulate. Perhaps from an example of my own personal experience, I can make somewhat clearer the concept of having a "patron saint." I have often observed in museums of Europe that tourists are somewhat taken aback when they enter a large hall where nothing else can be seen but floodlights poised on one single, glorious statue, let us say perhaps one of Apollo. They approach it usually with awe, walk slowly around it to observe its beauty and perfection from every angle. Then, involuntarily, almost unconsciously, the tourists themselves begin to emulate the model before them. They stand erecter, they hold the head higher, put their shoulders back, pull in their waist, and as they walk away they have obviously been "touched" and inspired by the symbol of perfection and the ideal of beauty they had just admired. This I find comparable to having a fraternity member look up to its patron saint. What can one find in him to take away as a model for one's future life? Do you already have a patron saint? Is there still room in today's world for such emulation?

The great twentieth-century poet, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) has put similar thoughts as these into a startlingly great sonnet titled "The Archaic Torso of Apollo" ("Archaischer Torso Apollos" - 1907). The poet begins the description of the mutilated torso in a quite negative and derogatory way. Nevertheless, there is still great vitality and an overwhelming beauty in the distorted block of marble: the glow of the surface, the blinding sheen of the curvature of the shoulders and chest, the supple twist of the loins. As the beholder gazes intently on the torso through the poet's eyes, it becomes vibrantly radiant and alive and animated with an internal power so that the eyes of the missing head seem to burst like brilliant stars from out the entire surface of the marble frame. We are admonished enigmatically and forcefully in the staccato-like last hemistich: "You must alter your own life." We are admonished not to let our own lives



be like a dead, distorted torso, but that our inner lives should be so endowed with a vibrant beauty of character that any one who meets us should recognize the high ideals that burst through so vitally and radiantly. The White Cross over the heart is the external symbol for Sigma Chi of the inner ideals they believe in and that show forth in their lives.

Thus it was that the seven devoted and dedicated founders of our fraternity faced the problem of selecting a proper patron worthy of exemplifying their own goals, aspirations, ambitions, and ideals. I often picture that enthusiastic group of seven young men at Miami in 1855 -- actually not much different really than you yourselves are -- conscientiously deliberating and trying to go back into the past to find some figure who could best guide them in their undertaking of founding a new fraternity. Being learned as they were, I can almost see their delight when one of them was fated to suggest a name so obvious, one wonders why everyone else before them would not have thought of it: the Emperor Constantine, Constantine the Great, who conquered by a cross, a White Cross! The thoughts of our seven founders about character and the role of ideals in our relationship to one another are still very valid today. They are comparable to a powerful magnet that continue to attract young men like iron rings; these in turn possess the power to communicate the thoughts to other rings, so that the influence of our original seven men of good character still circulates through all the links that are magnetically attached to each other in an endless chain. Each member initiated into Sigma Chi is thus still able to share the magnetism and inspiration and influence of the founders and can preserve and pass these on to others. All initiates have been linked together by the high idealism and principles which ideally, then, still emanate from them today. When we participate in the ceremony of the "laying on of hands," the principle teachings, goals, and ideals of the White Cross and of our founders will also symbolically be transferred from the members to the new initiates.

We know very much about the Emperor Constantine. We possess his letters and speeches; hundreds of his laws are still in existence; there has been a tremendous

literature about him since his reign; there are statues and busts of him and pictures and inscriptions on coins and pottery; there are legends about him and various panegyrics and contemporary biography (Eusebius). Much indeed has been written about him and the momentous changes in the history of the world which he accomplished. But there has also been much said against him by bitter partisans, since we today seem to be living in a period fond of debunking. Yet there are questionable, unchristian acts during his reign that perhaps justifiably cause some historians to label him a complex and not altogether admirable personality.

The main facts of Constantine's career are well established historically. He was born in the last decades (about 280) of the third century in what is today Serbia (in Naissus) as the son of Constantius I, the Roman governor of the British Isles and Gaul, later co-emperor of the Empire, and the mother, today known as Saint Flavia Helena. Constantine was sent to the Eastern part of the Empire (Nicomedia, Egypt, and Persia) to be reared, educated, and trained in an atmosphere to make him a forceful general and an efficient administrator. Here, he early distinguished himself by his personal bravery and fearlessness and by his wisdom and intellect. One of the first descriptions of him is as a young prince standing at the Emperor's right hand and attracting the gaze of all beholders by his physical beauty and his imposing air. His strength plus qualities of prudence extorted admiration and respect from everyone, for he showed himself to be high-spirited, keen-witted, strong, generous, and capable.

His father lay ill and dying in 306 in York, England, and he wanted to see his son before the end came, so Constantine hastened across all Europe to his bedside. When the father died, the army claimed the son as its leader, and he was heralded by unanimous choice of British, Gallic, and Germanic soldiers as the Augustus of the West, Overlord of Gaul, Spain, Britain, and the Rhineland. His entire manner was one that betokened he was born to rule. A true consciousness of his mission burned in him; he looked and acted the role of a ruler who had been elected and protected by the gods.

At this early age he was everywhere beloved, so that he was called by all

an Apollo. Constantine was at this time still a worshipper of this sun god, and it was Apollo's image that was struck on his coins. When trouble arose among the Germanic tribes, Constantine went to the Rhineland in 310 and successfully fought against the Franks and the Alamanns. Before this he had already conquered Spain and had married Fausta, the daughter of Maximian, the Caesar of Rome.

✓ At this time the ancient world was very decadent; the Roman Empire was divided and ruled by tyrannical and ruthless leaders, and great troubles faced the government. Cities were pillaged and sacked, the countryside desolated, and the citizenry unjustly executed. Life was shameless, the vices reigned supreme. Rome had become the center of plots and counterplots, treason, and conspiracy. Thus, it happened that everyone recognized in Constantine their only hope, and he was beseeched with pleas to overtake the government and capture Rome.

Constantine, therefore, left the Rhineland, and in 312 he crossed the Alps into Northern Italy with 40 000 men as compared with the enemy's 170 000, and finally pitched camp north of Rome. Everywhere he marched, the cities (Turin, Milan, Verona) acclaimed him; he seemed invincible. Yet he felt uneasy and apprehensive and was reluctant to attack Rome and anxiously debated with himself, if he should embark on such a dangerous enterprise where he was so thoroughly outnumbered. It almost seemed as if he were waiting for a sign, for some strong ally. And late one afternoon at sunset, he lifted his eyes heavenward and with all his soldiers saw in the skies the figure of a radiantly fiery cross with the Greek inscription: "By this sign thou shalt conquer." This has, of course, today become the fraternity's motto: "In hoc signo vinces."

It was truly a miracle, and the vision swept him off his feet. All were awe-struck. And even though the fourth century was a superstitious one, such manifestations in the sky are not unusual. Scientists believe such a rare, natural phenomenon could have been possible, just as is the aurora borealis. We must understand the conditions of late antiquity and its spiritual state to evaluate the vision-legend correctly. In any case, we cannot entirely obliterate the "mir-

acle" of the vision of the cross, and whether real or not, the vision was a real experience to Constantine, and it changed his whole life and the history of the world. It simply cannot be minimized or its significance cancelled.

Constantine asked himself as to the meaning of this vision. During the night in a dream, he saw a vision of Christ who demanded that he make an imitation of the cross in gold and precious stones, and to use it whenever he engaged in battle, for its divine power would bring victory and success. Or stated simply: Conquer by the cross! When Constantine awoke, he had craftsmen make a replica of the cross, and he had the image of the cross with a sacred monogram of Christ (X - P) in the center inscribed on the shields of all his soldiers with the motto of the vision. Look again at your pledge pin and see the origins for the White Cross set into the shield. Weapons and banners gleamed with the new insignia. Constantine was, thus, miraculously converted to the God of the Christians; he placed himself and his army under God's protection. A great change had come over him since he had seen the cross. Constantine's own cross, which he wore as an outward and visible proof of how he now felt in his heart, was preserved until the tenth century.

Constantine then marched triumphantly in an almost bloodless victory against Rome and the co-emperor Maxentius on October 20, 312. To the Romans he said: I have conquered your city from the tyrant by this sign. After defeating the East Roman Emperor Maximus (313) and the later one, Licinius (324), he thus became the sole Emperor of both the Eastern and Western Roman Empire. The senate and the people of Rome received him with triumphal victory and called him Maximus and Augustus and gave him the attributes of a god; his image with a laurel wreath and with eyes directed upward as if awaiting guidance from Heaven was stamped on the coins.

Constantine let bygones be bygones; he granted amnesties and clemency to his enemies; he restored order and dignity; and he was hailed as the bringer of peace and the liberator of the Empire. He charmed all by his patience, kindness, tolerance, dignity, and good humour. The Senate instituted games and festivals and erected a triumphal arch (315) in his honor, which today as the Arch of Constantine

in Rome standing beside the Colosseum is one of the most inspiring monuments of the Imperial Empire and on which in a frieze at the top can also be seen the chiseled story of the White Cross.

In the famous Edict of Milan in 313 he set up the noblest principles of complete religious toleration, although through him Christianity had now become the State religion. Anyone without distinction of rank or nationality was at liberty to practice the religion he thought best for himself, and Constantine especially abandoned the policy of bloody suppression of the Christian church.

[ The arts, especially architecture and sculpture, developed and flourished under Constantine; the beginning of the so-called Byzantine style of art dates from this time. He ruled mildly and tolerantly, with wisdom and prudence, because of the effect which the vision of the White Cross had had upon his life. In 325, in the prime of middle age, he convened and presided at the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in order to formulate Christian doctrine (the "Nicean Creed" was formulated here to oppose the Arian heresy); he was thus the supreme and absolute authority in both church and state, in both ecclesiastical and civil affairs ("Caesaro-papism"), a true champion of Christianity.

In 326 he wisely and strategically moved the seat of the Roman Empire to Byzantium at the entrance to the Bosphorus, where East and West, Asia and Europe meet. On May 11, 330 the great, rich, beautiful, <sup>city</sup> now renamed Constantinople, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and became the center of the Christian Empire. Establishing of the city is acclaimed as the greatest political achievement of his reign and one of the most momentous decisions in the history of Western Civilization. Constantinople — today it is known as Istanbul — remained the center of a glorious civilization that lasted a thousand years (1453).

✓ Constantine declared Sunday as a day of rest. He became the protector of marriage and the family. At a time when life was brutal and ruthless, he proclaimed honesty, integrity, and righteousness. His reign was one of feverish activity and filled with humane provisions. Constantine was a man's man, affable, and courteous. He was a statesman, the founder of cities, the builder of churches. He was an