

In His Words

Thomas Cowan Bell

[To those gathered at the Semi-Centennial celebration in Cincinnati in 1905.]

“Half a century ago seven of us laid the foundation of the structure the magnificent proportions of which we see today. I will not say that we builded better than we knew; but I will say that our hearts are full of pride at seeing the results of what we did. It has been said that you are honored with the presence of the four of the founders of our beloved fraternity. We feel that we are honored by your success.

“The elements of success of Sigma Chi are: First, beauty. Nothing in badges of fraternity equals ours as a thing of beauty—and only civilized man has an appreciation of the beautiful in art and nature. Second, there is the “grip” that holds. It is not a mere handshake. Third, there is brotherhood. And fourth, there is equality. I am told that in seeking new members you do not inquire into a man’s pedigree for financial standing, but only into his worth. Only such institutions as are founded on good principles survive the ‘marks of time, the law’s delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes.’

“You have kept alive the spirit of Sigma Chi. ‘The greatest of these is charity—love.’ The body grows old, the mental powers lose something of their strength; but the soul of man never grows old. You have acted on the motto: ‘Good to my brother.’ You have known what Theodore Roosevelt has spoken of as the ‘joy of duty done.’

“I come, as you know from far off Oregon—a wonderland, land of lofty mountains and fertile valleys, a land of delightful summer breezes, and mild winters. I shall return to it gladly after visiting my shrines in the Miami valley. The enthusiasm of the people of the Pacific coast has often been noted. It may be accounted for. Under some mysterious impulse, this race of ours has been moving westward for thousands of years. The culmination of this greatest of all the races of men, I verily believe, is in the Pacific Northwest of the United States.

“You sing, ‘I’ll be a Sig until I die’; be more, and St. Peter will recognize our White Cross and admit you without question within the gates of the Celestial City.

The Founders of Sigma Chi

“I am an optimist. I believe that the world is growing better day by day. May we so live and labor that it may be said of each of us, as we go to join the innumerable caravan that has gone before us to the pale realm of shade: “The world is better for his having lived.”



*Founder Bell and 1st Grand Consul
John S. McMillin, DePauw 1876*

*[To John S. McMillin, DePauw '76, first
Grand Consul, ca. 1910]*

“Ben Runkle was the embryonic soldier of the group and was a student of the Greek and Roman wars and Constantine was one of his heroes and the first of the Seven to catch the inspiration of the vision of Constantine, and to interweave it into the story of the White Cross and the slanting of the Badge over the left shoulder.”

[Founder Bell’s mentions ‘The White Cross and the slanting of the Badge over the left shoulder’ which was and is done to parallel and draw symbolism with Constantine, whose soldiers carried their swords in their right hand with the blade slanted across their breast, pointed over their left shoulder]

[To the Grand Chapter, dated January, 1913]

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“Isn’t it somewhat remarkable that the three oldest of the seven survive, Ben, Dan and myself. I often think of Frank Scobey. He was for a time my roommate. I remember him as a jolly fellow, but when I last met him he was, I think, the saddest man I ever met. He was at that time deaf and was shut out from communion with his fellows.

I need not tell you how proud I am of Sigma Chi. It has grown mightily. You have built a memorial house at old Miami in honor of the founders and you have embalmed our names and our merits in your ritual.”