

In His Words

Excerpt from the Address of Hon. Isaac M. Jordan before
the 15th Grand Chapter, August 1884

Isaac M. Jordan

The Convention of our society, which now meets in Cincinnati, is at



once a business meeting and a reunion, and is intended to advance the interests of our fraternity, and afford its members an opportunity for friendly intercourse and congratulation. Conventions and reunions of this kind are interesting and important, and I hope they will be kept up and well attended.

To the world outside, societies like ours mean but little, but to us who realize their benefits, who have enjoyed their pleasures, who associate them with everything that was agreeable in our college life, and who in them have found friendships that will last with life, they mean a great deal. We are Greeks and know how to appreciate them. We have laid aside our daily pursuits, avocations and duties to be present at this

Invitation to the 15th Grand Chapter in Cincinnati, Ohio showing Jordan as speaker.

time. . . I congratulate you all upon the high standing of your society, and upon the bright prospect before it in the future. I feel the highest pleasure and satisfaction in being one of its founders; and I regard every member of it with sentiments of the warmest and most sincere friendship; and I trust the chain which unites us may never be broken.

I have been requested to say something to you tonight in regard to the organization of our Fraternity, and as to the rights and usefulness of college secret societies such as ours. It is now more than a quarter of a century since the organization of our Fraternity, and yet every circumstance connected with it is a fresh in my mind as if it had all occurred but yesterday. Memory, ever faithful, brings back the whole scene before me, and I seem to see it painted with the most real colors. Bell and Cooper, and Scobey, and Caldwell and Runkle, all seem to stand before me as when I saw them last. The room where we met, the table at which we sat, and everything connected with it, rises distinct before my eyes.

In the year 1855, six young men, students of Miami University, determined to establish a new secret society, with a parent chapter at that university, and with other chapters to be established from time to time. The

principle and object of its organization were not to be different from those of other similar college societies. The purposes were praiseworthy and honorable, being the formation of a social and literary club, where young men, selected for their high moral character, mental endowments, literary tastes and congenial dispositions, could meet for the purpose of furthering their interest while at college. Such a society, we believed would be of great value to its members, in the formation of valuable friendships, in the cultivation of the social virtues, in promoting a taste for literature and in aiding each other to obtain the rewards and prizes usually offered by colleges to young men of high and honorable standing in their classes. These were the purposes which the founders of your society had in view. We accordingly organized the society, and called it Sigma Phi, from two Greek words which you all understand. The organization of such a society was an important event in the life and history of Miami University; and we met at first with much opposition and unfriendly treatment. The faculty held a meeting, and desired to be informed as to the object and purpose of our organization. This was easily and satisfactorily explained, and from that time they became our warm and devoted friends. The rival secret societies manifested their hostility and jealousy in a great many ways, and it was some time before they got over it. This was carried so far by the Beta Theta Pis that they stole our constitution, by-laws, and every paper connected with the organization of our society. This created much bitterness, and it was some time before it died out. We, however, adopted a new constitution, and changed the name of our society to that which it now bears—Sigma Chi. The rivalries and jealousies soon passed away; we forgot our wrongs, forgave the Betas, and all the societies of the university became friendly to us. We took great pride in our fraternity, and added new members to it. We endeavored to make it the leading society at old Miami; we entered upon all our college duties with great zeal and earnestness, studied hard, tried to excel in every department of study, contended for every hall or college prize, and endeavored to make our fraternity have a high and honorable standing. So far as we were able, we established branches and chapters at other colleges, and when I left school, in 1857, the fraternity was in a successful and prosperous condition. Such was the origin of your society, and such the purposes for which it was formed. We builded far better than we knew, or thought. The growth has been almost phenomenal. I can hardly realize it. Commencing at one university it has spread all over the United States, and it now has chapters in most of the leading colleges of the country. Starting with a membership of six young men, it has now more than three thousand members, among whom are to be found men of eminence and distinction in every walk and profession in life. Senators, governors, judges, lawyers, clergymen, professors, teachers, physicians and men of business, all of whom, so far as I know, reflect honor upon the society of which they are members. Meeting as we do at this time in convention, we send warm greetings to the thousands of our brethren, who are absent, but who, we feel, are bound to us in the

bonds of brotherhood, and by a chain of friendship which unites every honest Sigma Chi with us, wherever he may be, in any part of the world.

Let me say here, that in my judgment our Fraternity has grown to be what it is, by adhering to the principle with which we started in the beginning, of admitting no man to membership in it who is not believed to be a man of good character, of fair ability, of ambitious purposes, and of congenial disposition. In a word, by the admission of none but gentlemen; and in no other way can such a society be continued. It is much more important that we should have but a few chapters and have them good ones, that we should have but a few members and have them honorable ones, than to have many chapters or many members. The decadence of other societies can be traced to a violation of this principle, and to an ambition to have many chapters and a large membership.

And let me here give a word of advice and admonition to the members of every chapter. Whenever you find an unworthy member of your society, expel him at once and without hesitation. Evil communications corrupt good morals, and one dishonorable man will bring reproach and dishonor upon your chapter and upon the whole Fraternity. The amount of mischief which one abandoned and dissolute young man can do is incalculable; he destroys everything around him; avoid him as you would a pestilence. One drop of poison will defile the purest spring. Avoid by all means the poison, the virus, the hemlock of bad associations.

Brother Sigmas, we belong to a society worthy of our highest regard and warmest affection. We are united in the strong and enduring bonds of friendship and esteem. Let us each and all do our duty and conduct ourselves that we bring no dishonor upon our society or each other. And we may have the high and proud satisfaction of knowing that our beautiful emblem of purity, will never be worn over any breast which does not beat with pure, generous and noble emotions, and by no man who is not a man of honor.



Artist's concept drawing of the Jordan Monument, Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio