

Opportunity Out of Defeat

This speech was given at the annual initiation banquet of the Fraternity, which was still a local fraternity, Saturday, October 19, 1907. Frater Wallace G. McCauley delivered this address.

Someone has said that most victories are defeats. As to the truth of that statement, numerous instances can be cited tending to establish it. But just as true is the converse of that proposition, that most defeats are victories, and I truly believe as instance of this was our failure to have reinstated the Phi Delta Theta charter of Illinois Epsilon. I believe this in spite of the fact that no one labored more zealously to that end during the first two campaigns than myself; but now, after an absence of a year or so, I am brought to the conviction that Tau Kappa Epsilon was indeed fortunate in her defeats, because thereby there was reserve for us a large opportunity.

Phi Delta Theta is indeed an honorable fraternity, and as a choice of perpetuating our own, there is no fraternity I would rather we would affiliate with than Phi Delta Theta. And to join with any lesser fraternity of which we have promise of success, I am unalterably opposed, for me it would be like a governorship aspirant, after having failed, accepting the office of poundmaster. And while Phi Delta Theta is great, and her members adorn high positions in our nation, conspicuous among whom are the members of the Bloomington alumni who championed our cause and for whose efforts in our behalf we shall never be ungrateful, still Phi Delta Theta is not free from the same criticism which can be alleged against existing fraternities of today.

The Greek letter societies have degenerated from their original purpose of the cultivation of literary attainments to mere social clubs. They have put the social feature in the ascendancy and have let everything contribute to that end. As a result there has developed a school aristocracy with all that it means - show and pretense have been magnified at the expense of true worth; they have fostered extravagance among students when economy was required; they have made secretism a fetish and symbolism an idolatry; many of the palatial home of the fraternities have been the scenes of ribald drinking bouts and excesses the worst imaginable, and too often their gruesome ceremonies have resulted in severe injuries and even the death of their initiates.

But the strongest indictment can be brought against the fraternities of today, because to its far reaching consequence, is the decline of interest in the literary societies of our schools caused by them. What is true of Wesleyan is true generally of our schools throughout our country. To be sure there are exceptions, as Beloit and DePauw, but what these small colleges have accomplished in literary attention should give us encouragement of what Wesleyan can accomplish if we properly address ourselves to this subject. It is a matter of general observation that the fraternities have drawn from the literary efforts of our school life to the social feature. While fraternity men take an active interest in literary societies and quite often represent them, still this interest is spasmodic and occasional, whereas it should be continuous and persistent throughout the college course. The literary society is the laboratory of our academic course, and the student who

gives that his attention will, in after life, become a leader in thought and voice of the great social problems which are pressing for settlement.

Then, to revive the literary feature of our fraternity, which was the original object of Greek letter societies, is the greatest opportunity offered us, and the main objective which would most rapidly build us up as a national fraternity. To that end let us build our organization upon the foundation of Christian brotherhood, with the common purpose of scholarship which is the chief reason of our being here, and literary attainment which will be the chief reason of our association. Let us also, in appropriate article, in fitting language, declare ourselves against clannishness and exclusiveness, and declare for a fraternalism not to be practiced selfishly toward ourselves, but toward all men with whom we come in contact. Let us, too, pronounce ourselves against weird, awesome initiation, which may be innocent in themselves, but at the most are mere fol-de-rol and indolent waste of valuable time. In place of such let us compose a ceremony illustrative of the objects of our fraternity, open as daylight, as expressive of the eternal verities of life as a beautiful landscape revealed by a newly risen sun.

Then let us issue a magazine, quarterly as first, name it The Teke, make it attractive and artistic in form. Let it be piquant and virile in tone, representative of our fraternity, and a reflector of student life generally. And in this connection we can realize the important bearing the literary forum of our fraternity would have on our fraternity organ. Publication in the magazine would furnish an incentive to literary endeavor, and in turn the best literary efforts to the forum would furnish the bulk of the contributions required. It is not extravagant to predict that in five years we would have the finest student publication extant, and our members would be successful representatives in the interstate oratory and debate contests.

For the high objects of a fraternity which I have outlined, Tau Kappa Epsilon has been peculiarly fitted. In the first place we have been fortunate in the choice of a name. It is a name to conjure with. The combination of initials are a few of the Greek Letters which coincide with the English letters, so you see we have a name that is both suggestive of our own tongue with a Greek origin. The name falls readily on the tongue in the combination Teke, which sounds even more euphonious and popular than Deke, the common name of one of the largest of the fraternities. To appreciate the real value of our name, we have only to ask the opinion of an advertising man.

And then we have been twice advantaged in the selection of our pin. No more distinctive or appropriate pin is worn by any fraternity man than the emblem of Tau Kappa Epsilon. And last, but by no means least, we have been thrice fortunate in the securing of our members. It is indeed remarkable how we failed to get, as Jake says, the men we didnt get, and got the men we got. Truly they are the salt of Wesleyan and if Wesleyan should lose its savor, wherewith would it be salted.

Interwoven about the sentiments of our name and our pin, and ingrained in the fiber of every member is the Teke spirit - a spirit typical of our fraternity - a spirit that does not shrink from sacrifice, that knows no defeat; a spirit indomitable. A spirit which is

breathed into a national Tau Kappa Epsilon would spread our organization throughout the schools of our country. Now again concerning our joining another fraternity. To do so we would give up our name, throw away our pin, and dissipate a spirit, or turn it into another channel, which would never be the same as it was under Tau Kappa Epsilon.

But if we keep Tau Kappa Epsilon intact, the Teke spirit, like Tennysons brook, will flow on forever. Fellow brothers, I have been a Teke for six years, we are assembled here as Tekes, and if you are in the same spirit I am tonight, we shall be Tekes until the moon shall wax and wane no more.

In the choice of our name, in the selection of our pin, in the securing of our members, I cannot believe that mere luck brought us our good fortune, but rather I cannot help but recognize even in our small affairs the hand of an overruling Providence. And we may believe that the Providence that has attended us in the past, will conduct us into the promised land of the future.

Let us not lack faith in this project. Remember faith as a grain of mustard will overcome mountains of difficulty. The history of other organizations lends to this encouragement. Phi Delta Theta was born a few years before the Civil War in a students room of a building at Miami University, less pretentious than the preparatory building on the Wesleyan campus, and today Phi Delta Theta is the fourth largest fraternity in existence. The Modern Woodmen were organized less than 20 years ago and now are the largest fraternal-benefit order. And so I might quote other instances of equal and stronger encouragement than these.

Fellow brothers, Tau Kappa Epsilon was conceived in the early struggles of our existence. The time is now ripe to start in on a national career, and we, its godfathers here tonight, when it as grown to be a strong and lusty organization, touching student life everywhere with the beneficence of its principles, will obtain a satisfaction inexpressible in the part we had in its inception.