

CHAPTER 16
FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES

THESE organizations are found in a great many colleges and universities. In many places in the past they have been the cause of serious problems of various kinds. In more recent years, through the efforts of their national secretaries, they have been managed better and much more in harmony with college administrations.

Essentially, these organizations are clubs, the active members electing all new members, the chief object being to promote the social life of the members and, with few exceptions, to operate a clubhouse providing rooms and board for all or part of the members. While they stress the fact that they are secret societies, they differ very little in plan of organization and operation from the men's clubs with restricted membership found in all large cities.

It costs about \$100 a year more for a member to pay his dues and live in a fraternity house than for a nonmember to live modestly outside. Usually the living quarters are pleasant, and the food served is good. Membership usually ranges from twenty-five to sixty, with some smaller and some larger chapters. The social life is pleasant and generally wholesome. The tendency of most fraternities is toward overemphasis on social life and participation in student activities, and away from high scholarship.

On the whole the members and alumni under national supervision can be depended upon for the successful operation of these houses. There are, however, a few points on which control and assistance can well be given locally. Especially, an institution can be truly helpful in auditing fraternity

accounts, providing some common social control, and in keeping a check of the scholarship of fraternity members.

Auditing Fraternity Accounts

An organization of thirty members providing rooms and board will handle \$9,000 or more a year. In many fraternities with large membership, this may run to \$20,000 or more. This is too large a sum to be handled by inexperienced undergraduates without careful supervision. Where no supervision is given, usually one-third of the organizations on a campus are poorly managed each year; collections run behind, and expense exceeds income. Where such poor management exists its influence on the numbers of the organization encourages carelessness in money affairs and is bad.

Today many institutions provide in connection with the business office an auditor of fraternity and sorority accounts, or has them audited by the auditor of student activities. Suitable books and forms are required, generally uniform throughout all organizations, and they are audited monthly. Under such supervision, collections are made promptly, deficits are rare, the treasurer receives excellent business training, and the whole business tone of the organization is good. Usually a charge of 1 or 2 per cent of the gross receipts is made to cover cost, so that the audit is entirely self-supporting. As each fraternity must prepare a budget and operate within its receipts, extravagant parties are avoided, and useless competition among organizations in expensive ways is effectively discouraged.

Social Control

On the whole the aims of the social organization and of the administration are the same. Both desire parties to be pleasant and respectable. Both wish to avoid anything bordering on scandal. Almost always when undesirable happenings

occur, it is due to ignorance of good social practice on the part of those responsible, to undesirable leadership in the social committee, or to excesses of uncontrolled alumni.

Today most fraternities and all sororities maintain a resident housemother. Usually she is able to maintain the social life and all parties on a pleasant and satisfactory level. It is advantageous for the institution to pay part of the housemother's salary, as this insures a reasonable wage, gives the proper official of the institution a part in selecting desirable persons for these positions, and makes the housemother directly responsible to the institution.

In a large institution it is worthwhile to employ a competent woman of attractive personality to work with all students responsible for the management of college social affairs inside and outside the fraternities. The assistance such a person gives not only can greatly aid the students in making their affairs pleasant and agreeable, but it enables the institution to keep sufficient touch and control to avoid most undesirable parties. The American college in the end is responsible for the character of the social life of its students.

The old theory that the college president stands in the place of the parents to all students is rather appalling when there are thousands of students, but it is hard to reach any other conclusion in regard to this relationship. The parents do look to the college, and therefore to the president, as responsible for the care of their children's health, morals, and social conduct. The college should make certain that fraternity and sorority parties are pleasant, properly conducted, and such as the parents could approve.

Further, the students attending American colleges constitute one of the most democratic groups imaginable so far as social background is concerned. Many young people very promising in ability are almost wholly lacking in any social experience. A very great service is rendered them, if while in

college they form correct ideals of social life and have some experience in conducting themselves properly at social affairs. We are constantly graduating from every institution students who, while coming from very simple, humble homes, have outstanding ability. At college they should not only be trained to serve largely, but should there develop the social grace to enable them to serve in high places with becoming manners.

Scholarship

It is reasonable and desirable to encourage fraternity members to elect as president and other important officers in the organization, members of good scholarly standing. A good attitude toward scholarly work cannot be expected of a society whose leaders rank below, or just at the minimum average required for graduation. It is always to be remembered that these societies have real pride in their organizations and do not intentionally elect unworthy students to office. Some advice and encouragement along this line rather than rules will generally be effective.

In institutions with low entrance requirements, such as mere high school graduation; pledging and initiation, or at least initiation, should be limited by college rules to students who give evidence of their ability to carry on their college course to graduation. If an organization is allowed to bring into its membership a considerable proportion of students indifferent to scholarship, its influence on new members must be bad. For an institution to cherish a society with special privileges, claiming superior social standing, which is made up of members and led by officers indifferent or opposed to high scholarship, is certainly both absurd and unwise.

With financial control and some social direction, it is possible to develop the fraternities and sororities into very useful organizations, contributing a considerable value to

the institutional life and doing much to develop fine social ideals in their members.