Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

http://archives.dickinson.edu/

Documents Online

Title: "Secret Societies in American Colleges," by Thomas L. Jones

Format: Commencement Oration

Date: June 5, 1901

Location: Orations-1901-J793s

Contact:

Archives & Special Collections Waidner-Spahr Library Dickinson College P.O. Box 1773 Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Secret Societies in American College.
Thomas Lower's

The position of Secret Societies in American colleges is peculiar. Ignores, discourages, and prolibites; they live, flourish, and increase. Every college has thew, and they are grow-- ing in strong the and munbers! To fully ascertain their character and influence involves considerable labor, but results richly regay us for our effort. Of one thing we may be certain, and that is, that common Licion of them is Erroneous; as is that of corrything connected with colleges! Little or no attention is given to such subjects; and get the fact that thous ands of young new are in attendance at

the ligher institutions of learning in this country, who, by their training, will be the natural guides of State, and leaders in the forofessions, is sunly momentous enough to justify some slight consideration. With this in view, the importance of all student associations becomes wident; and that few freeze and less care anything of the gamethet of danger every boy weest run before the reaches Connecement Day" becomes unaccountable. A will suspicion duelle in the minds of many that a great deal g-dessipation goes ou; and that it is rather daugorous to mest a boy

at college. And it is, parliago, generally placed that, of all pails besetting the pathes of students, river are so daugerous as traternities; in consequence of which they have true forbidden by samuets; promed on by faculties, and most bitterly outag--origin by so called How trateruity sludente Det us see if such to the case. If Frakruties are banded to gather to min verdant treshmen; if they unitably play the parts of say la and Charybois, both at our, sluxuresping and sevallowing up the innocent, the some such a mouster les hanget, -drawn, and greatered, the letter.

But let us remark at the outset, that it is an obvious mistake to hold the septem responsible for the wis deeds of its members, for like reasoning would contemu the college itself. Only where it can to show that without such associations young men would be saints, may it to inferred that the system is wrong. The stand and of morality at every college is fearfully love. Yet, in the schools of England, where the ages of the boys an about the same as these of our college students, and when there are us traternities, the want of virtue is quite ao glaring as in over our colleges. There are vices provalent at very wellege which may will reasie the farmet shudder.

Not the roqueste Freke, nor occasional unie suppero, need cause alanu, for the former among only the victime, and the latter an well lit off by Thackeray as " therty lads around a table, covered well bad severtiments, driesfreg bad wrues, telling bad stones, and singing bad songs over and over again," and such practices are discarded as soon as the bilanty red astricto like degestion of youth

If the character of traternities is to be improved, the habits of college men must be changed their we should not the distriction hieron youthful francie, and those that are vulgar, low, and means The worst view of young men

como from a too regiorous consership orse their actions, and a devial of suitable recreations. I love of frew and frolie, and a realised desire to see the world," promet youth to will and way ward actions, but hardly to serious crue: When fuddled with account spirits, and girly with couestatutional joy, they are to be forgives for fresting and cakening in sheer paroxyours of merriment. To condemn this chillition of youthful gainty with surepuly demucration and ingualified abuse unheater a Pentaucal "Plaravaisu", faustical and univise. As well try to put out fire with a bellower And, after all, the experience, gained

in the follies of youth, is a teacher worth for more, to many, Iteau Tutor or Professor. " It is only by looking back over the towns of our departer cross, that we can see, by the side of Each, the face of a warning angel" If there be real good in man, he will grow Gener and letter as he grows older; and when we know that youthful thoughtlessness is responsible for neach of our Early vice, may us not hope much from the more maters years: that they will bring certhe them vertue "ed westow? Since fact brais out this extentation, let the "austire invalist" remember that -In the censeas oning progress gette world,

a wiser spirit is at work for us. a letter Exp than theirs, most probegal Of Hessing, and west studeous of our good, Even in what seems our most imprutful hours. With this thought in rund, and in this spirit, we should undeavor to oaver our fellows from the consequences of their guarance and folly. This, I claim, Secret Siculties, have always done They are not Mission Bands," but they can and do, clevate and buefit wenters. To the egoing student, immered from home influences, and debarred from home society, the Frateruty is a god sent. Here he fueds the fellowship, the vanety, the spice, and, test of all, the brotherhood,

for which he longs. Jewal, intimate, and bearty, good fellowship, coupled with the spirit of brotherhood, makes up the capstone of the trateruly system. Fraternities have planned un rebellions, but have furnished Enjoyment and content The septem reals the college itself in stability and Endurance. They fill a gap in college less, inspiring all with nurance and regard. They tring true freuds, and these are Heaven's clivices! Messings. Here twee enderring intimacies are comented. The minting ties are not weak and evanescent, but of the Twigle febre of luman bearts, doubling our joy, and duiding our sommer.

Hethe the present generation it remains, whether the septem with its tremendous influence shall be a pour for good or for wil. Its past is glowies! its present wespering. What of the future? If cach wenter shall do his test to build it up it may save many a man, be a blessing to many a parent; and will de reuch for the spent of art and education. Shafed with - a hatret of hey paracy, shaw, and vice; and with a low for prenty, courage, and truth, the frateruty sigo lein will have found the Levosto gottel, with which to grapple man fast to man, so that neither time nor change

may part them; and, animated by
this spirit, will take a rang
ligher chair fordest favery cur dround

g, and well forever retain the love

g good and howest men, - because it
will be worthy of them.

Finis.

Commencement Oration of Thomas L. Jones of 1901 <u>Transcribed by Timothy Flaherty, February 2015</u> Edited by Daniel Duchaine, October 2017

Oration Secret Societies in American Colleges Thomas L. Jones '01

The position of secret societies in American colleges is peculiar. Ignored, discouraged, and prohibited, they live, flourish, and increase. Every college has them, and they are growing in strength and numbers. To fully ascertain their character and influence involves considerable labor, but results richly repays us for our effort. Of one thing we may be certain, and that is, that common opinion of them is erroneous; as is that of everything connected with colleges. Little or no attention is given to such subjects; and yet the fact that standards of young men are in attendance at

the higher institutions of learning in this country, who, by their training will be the natural guides of state, and leaders in the professions is surely momentous enough to justify some slight consideration.

With this in view, the importance of all student associations becomes evident, and that few know and less care anything of the gauntlet of danger every boy must [run?] before he reaches "Commencement Day" becomes unaccountable. A wild suspicion dwells in the minds of many that, a great deal of dissipation goes on; and that it is rather dangerous to trust a boy

at college. And it is, perhaps, generally believed that, of all perils besetting the paths of students, more are so dangerous as fraternities in consequence of which they have been forbidden by parents; frowned on by faculties, and most bitterly [ostracized?] by so called now fraternity students

Let us see is such be the case. If fraternities are banded together to ruin verdant freshman, if they veritably play the parts of Scylla and Charybdis, both at once, shipwrecking and swallowing up the innocent, the sooner such a monster be hanged, drawn, and quartered, the better.

But let us remain at the outset, that it is an obvious mistake to hold the system responsible for the misdeeds of its members, for like reasoning would condemn the college itself. Only when it can be shown that without such associations young men would be saints, may it be inferred that the system is wrong. The standard of morality at every college is fearfully low. Yet, in the schools of England, where the ages of the "boys" are about the same as those of our college students, and where there are no fraternities, the want of virtue is quite as glaring as in our own colleges. There are vices prevalent at every college which may well make the parent shudder

not the roguishe tricks nor occasional [wine?] supper, need cause alarm, for the former annoy only the victim, and the latter are well but off by Thackeray as "thirty lads around a table, covered [well?] bad sweet meats, drinking bad wines, telling bad stories, and singing bad songs over and over again," and such practices are discarded as soon as the hilarity and ostrich like digestion of youth depart.

If the character of fraternities is to be improved, the habits of college men must be changed. And in judging them we should note the destruction [htierem?] youthful [Franko?], and those that are vulgar, low, and mean. The worst vices of young men

come from, a too rigorous censorship over their actions, and a denial of suitable recreations. A love of fun and frolic, and a natural desire to "see the world," prompt youth to wild and wayward actions, but hardly to serious crime. When fuddled with animal spirits, and giddy with constitutional joy, they are to be forgiven for breaking and [capening?] in their [paroxysius?] of merriment. To condemn this ebullition of youthful gaiety with sweeping denunciation and unqualified abuse, whether a Puritanical "Pharasaism", fanatical and unwise. As well try to put out lives with a bellows.

And after all the experience gained

in the follies of youth is a teacher worth far more, to many, than tutor or professor. "It is only by looking back over the truths of our departed errors that we can see, by the side of each, the face of a warring-angel."

If there be real good in man, he will grow truer and better as he grows older; and when we know that youthful thoughtlessness is responsible for much of our early vice, may we not hope much from the more mature years: that they will bring forth their virtue and wisdom? Since fact leans out this expectation, let the "austere moralist" remember that – "In the unreasoning progress of the world,

a wiser spirit is at work for us. A better eye than theirs, most prodigal of blessing, and most studious of our good, ever in what seems and must untruthful lower."

With this thought in mind, and in this spirit we should endeavor to save our fellows from the consequences of their ignorance and folly. This, I claim, Secret Societies have always done. They are not "Mission Bands" but they can and do, elevate and benefit members. To the young student, [unencumbered?] from home influences, and debarred from home society, the Fraternity is a god send. Here he finds the fellowship, the variety, the spice, and best of all, the brotherhood,

for which he longs. Genial, intimate, and lastly, good fellowship, coupled with the spirit of brotherhood, makes up the capstone of the fraternity system.

Fraternities have planned no rebellions, but have furnished enjoyment and content. The system [rivals?] the college itself in stability and endurance. They fill a gap in college life, inspiring all with reverence and regard. They bring true friends, and these are Heaven's choicest blessings. Here true enduring intricacies are cemented. The [wirting?] lies are not weak and evanescent, but of the [Wigle fibre?] of human hearts, doubling our joys and dividing our sorrows.

With the present generation it remains whether this system with its tremendous influence shall be a power for good or for evil. Its past is glorious; its present wispering. What of the future? If each member shall do its best to build it up, it may save many a man, be a blessing to many a parent; and will do much for the spirit of art and education. Shaped with a hatred of hypocrasy, shown, and vice; and with a love for purity, courage, and truth, the "fraternity system will have of steel, with which to grapple man fast to man, so that neither tune nor change

may part them; and, animated by this spirit, will take a rank higher than fondest fancy ever dreamed of, and will forever retain the love of good and honest men, -because it will be worthy of them.