

# The Phi Beta Kappa Key: A Practical Appraisal

By A. J. G. PRIEST

My first awareness of Phi Beta Kappa was achieved at the University of Idaho 38 years ago. It came through a professor of English who wore his particularly glittering key on a black silk watch fob and who waved it in our teeth as he lectured.

I can never forget the man's often reiterated greeting to his classes. It was: "Young men and young women of the University of Idaho, whom I salute at the beginning of mediocre careers." To this day, I am not sure whether he meant to be challenging or merely insulting, but in all events he was quite wrong. His classes included Donald K. David, who was to become Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration after a brilliant Wall Street experience, Ernest K. Lindley, a widely known journalist, Dr. Julian Deigh Boyd, an outstanding pediatrician, Colonel William A. Boekel, who rendered distinguished service in India and elsewhere, and at least several others whose lives have been made to count and to count greatly.

Furthermore, my Alma Mater is quite astonishingly like the University of Oklahoma. Therefore, with the distressing example of my aboriginal Phi Beta Kappa strongly in mind, let me hail the undergraduates among you as, "Young men and young women of the University of Oklahoma, whom I salute at the beginning of careers which may well shape and guide the destinies of community and state and nation. Yes, and perhaps the planet." You see, Mr. Chairman, I believe in the State Universities, and I have limitless confidence in what the future holds for their graduates.

I will attempt tonight a practical appraisal of the Phi Beta Kappa key, not speaking as a college professor (for I have had that status only since February), but rather as a practicing lawyer who has rather closely observed the wearers of our golden key both in that pleasant hinterland, the intermountain West, and in Wall Street. Like the amiable members of the House of Lords in "Iolanthe," I make

"... no pretence  
To intellectual eminence,  
Or scholarship sublime."

Upon the contrary, I seek only to bring

to these newly initiated members of our great society at once cordial and enthusiastic congratulations and a caveat. The Phi Beta Kappa key is not a magic talisman. In and of itself, it opens no oysters, least of all the oyster called the world.

In the New York building where my law firm maintains its offices, we had for some years a floor man who wore just underneath his necktie a king-size Phi Beta Kappa key. In that particular building a floor man's duties were confined to the delivery of papers and the greeting of occasional visitors. He ranked no more than two degrees above an office boy, and his compensation quite certainly was the lowest received by any adult in the building's employment. I naturally was interested in the man, and one day I asked him what his chapter was. He replied in a piping treble, "Columbia, 19\_\_." I learned later that he spoke five languages, but that life and its responsibilities were too much for him.

Twenty years or more ago, I met another Phi Beta Kappa, a brilliant lad who also had been graduated from a New York City institution. He wanted to practice law in Texas, so I recommended him to an excellent Houston firm and he was hired. Unfortunately, the young man had been told that his I.Q. was so high as to label him a "genius," and he saw no reason why he should not take over the full obligation of a senior partner immediately. After about six months, he and the law firm concluded that his talents were wasted on the humid air of Houston, and I haven't the least idea what finally became of him.

I am constrained to direct your attention to just one more figure in a personal gallery of less than towering Phi Beta Kappas. He was employed by my New York firm, and his difficulty was that he seemed constitutionally incapable of taking a job and going off by himself and doing it. One morning I assigned a bit of work to him and, after he had asked such questions as then occurred to him, I said, "Russ, so far as this chore is concerned, I have just died. I know you're sorry, but that is the melancholy fact. I don't want to hear anything more from you until you have finished." He was back in my office within ten min-

utes, seeking further directions and when, several weeks later, he received an offer from another firm, we placed no straws in his path.

What is a Phi Beta Kappa key? The greatly desired and deeply cherished emblem of the first American Greek letter fraternity? Certainly! But, I think my friend, John A. Laing of Portland, Oregon, may have appraised it after a more popularly acceptable fashion when, asked about his own key, he said, "Oh, that's a sign that says I was a bright boy in college!"

Just one more item and then I think I can cease being quite so unorthodox. In my unregenerate younger days, I once saw a brisk lad rub a pair of dice on his Phi Beta Kappa key and heard him whisper, "Get smart, bones!" Then he proceeded to make eight straight passes!

But will your key be valuable to you in other respects? Of course the answer is a thundering "Yes!" It will almost assure your admission to law school, or to a college of medicine, or to divinity school. It will certainly help you get started in any of the professions. And in your later lives, wherever Phi Beta Kappa alumnae and alumni gather, it will assure you the company of congenial spirits. But, is it a certain passport to the satisfaction of high achievement? Please forgive me, when I say that I think not. If I may paraphrase a slogan developed by a famous advertising agency (where, incidentally, Phi Beta Kappas are warmly welcome), "something more must be added."

Let me begin my suggestions as to what should be added and let me also demonstrate my own essential vulgarity, by turning to baseball. Back in the middle '20's, a certain Eastern institution (which does not have a Phi Beta Kappa chapter) produced a pitcher who, in college baseball, was a sensation. He won 17 or 18 straight games and was eagerly sought by various major league teams. He finally signed with the Detroit Tigers, then managed by George Moriarty, and I happened to be in the Yankee Stadium one afternoon when he was selected to pitch against one of the most formidable Yankee teams of all time, a team which included Babe Ruth, Lou

Gehrig, Lazzeri, Coombs, Meusel, Dugan, and others who formed the aggregation of redoubtable hitters called "Murderers' Row." Our young friend, who for these purposes must be called Richard Doe, was warmed up by Oscar Stanage, veteran Detroit catcher. I was seated just behind the visitors' bench, and I heard this conversation between Stanage and George Moriarty, as the game was about to begin:

"How did he warm up, Oscar?"

"Not so good, George. Not so good. He just ain't bearin' down on his curve ball!"

As hardly need be said, it was quite, quite necessary to bear down on your curve ball when you pitched against Murderers' Row, and young Mr. Doe, who did not, soon found himself taking a nice, warm shower. You have already disclosed your ability to bear down on the curve ball in college, but I most solemnly assure you that it will be necessary to continue that bearing down in business, in the professions, in whatever role life finds for you.

And now let me offer you that same advice in far more eloquent and rhetorical language, that of Sir William Osler as he addressed a medical school graduating class at the University of Toronto. He had observed, as some of you will recall, that there is a master word, and he went on to say:

It is the open sesame to every portal; the great equalizer in the world; the true philosopher's stone that transmutes all the baser metal of humanity into gold. The stupid it will make bright; the bright, brilliant, and the brilliant, steady. With the magic word in your heart, all things are possible and without all study is vanity and vexation. To the youth, it brings hope; to the middle-aged, confidence; to the aged, repose. True balm of hurt minds, in its presence the heart of the sorrowful is lightened and consoled. Not only has it been the touchstone of progress, but it is the measure of success in everyday life.

And the master word is work, a little word, but fraught with momentous consequences for you if you can but write it on the tablets of your hearts and bind it upon your foreheads.

Item number two: Capacity for enthusiasm. If you do not already possess it, be assured that it definitely is required to be added. There has been a recent vogue in many colleges for that seventh deadly sin of the old theologians, *acedia*, which has been defined as torpor of the spirit, emotional sluggishness, sloth, and surliness. I have visited a number of campuses in recent years, and I have found at least one or two sufferers from *acedia* wherever I have gone, lads who participate in no college activities, whose bills accumulate, who seem incapable of even the mildest enthusiasms. These blasé, languid youths are not even within the category Robert Louis Stevenson had in mind when he exclaimed, "For God's sake, give me the young man who has brains enough to make a fool of himself." Such gentry contribute nothing and their affliction unfortunately is communicable, sometimes infecting an entire undergraduate group.

Their contemporaries usually are able to jolt such ambulatory yawns into a genuine effort to demonstrate that they are alive, and I am sure that no member of this distressing species ever makes Alpha of Oklahoma, but perhaps even a Phi Beta Kappa needs to be told occasionally that apathy never won a war or a woman or an argument; that languor and listlessness *can* erode their victims' souls; that the converse of ardor for eagles is torpor for toads.

In the course of a recent experience in The New York Hospital, I became acquainted with several internes and residents on surgical service, picked young

men who had earned their staff positions through rigorous competitive examinations. Each of them is, of course, faced with service in the armed forces the moment his tour of hospital duty is completed. And, as one youthful surgeon told me, "That's only part of the story, for after we serve our two years and then succeed in establishing a practice somewhere, the Army is likely to reach out and take us again." In a word, these outstandingly competent youngsters have no greater sense of security, no more feeling of certainty as to what the future holds, than some twenty-year-old sophomore whose draft board has found him sound of wind and limb.

But there the similarity probably ends, for the sophomore may be one of these *acedia*-afflicted, lackadaisical youths one still encounters, and whatever else may be said about a surgical interne in The New York Hospital, no trace of apathy is apparent in his make-up. The young surgeons I talked to were ardently enthusiastic about their work and profoundly grateful for the privilege of observing and serving under the magnificent practitioners of the surgical arts to whom they were assigned. Hours meant nothing to them. If it was necessary for them to stay in the operating room all night, they remained all night, and rejoiced in their opportunity. And they had to assume responsibility, too, often when a life was at hazard.

The third item which I think might well be added is genuine affection for people. And I am not referring solely to persons having an ancestor who served for 90 days under General George Washington. Or only to persons whose epidermal coloring is white or pink, but rather to all sorts and conditions of people whithersoever dispersed about the globe.

Several weeks ago, I talked with a friend who had just returned from Yokohama, where she had been an observer at an All-Asian conference on world government. In the course of telling me about her several days of close association with dedicated men and women from every part of the Far East, a thought seemed to occur to her, and she said, "You know, after about four days together, we actually began to look alike!" Just so!

Rudyard Kipling was an almost complete imperialist, a white-man's-burden lad, but he must spin in his cerements when he hears the usual references to his "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." For such allusions miss the entire point of his poem, whose final couplet, as this audience need hardly be told, is:

But there is neither East nor West, Border  
nor Breed nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face,

#### About the Author

A. J. Gustin Priest, now Professor of Law at the University of Virginia, a native of Nebraska, graduated from the University of Idaho in 1918 and received his LL.B. in 1921. He served as a sergeant in the Infantry during World War I. He was attorney and secretary of the Idaho Power Company, 1922-26, and of the Electric Bond and Share Company, in New York City, 1926-35. Since 1937 he has been a member of the firm of Reid and Priest. He served as chairman of the board of directors of Federal Union Inc., and is a member of the executive council of United World Federalists. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa Associates and has been active in the affairs of the fraternity. "Phi Beta Kappa: A Practical Appraisal" was delivered at the annual initiation banquet of the Oklahoma Alpha Chapter in May, 1953.





though they come from the ends of the earth!

Kipling's proposition would have been equally sound, of course, if he had substituted "two idealists" or "two genuine liberals" for his "two strong men." But I think that even Rudyard would have found it difficult to convince Senator McCarran, shall we say, or Senator Bricker, or certain other and lesser neo-isolationists, including a former president of the American Bar Association, who have set out to demonstrate that nobody, but nobody, could possibly be as American as they are and that anyone who disagrees with them must, perforce be un-American.

This was not intended to be an exposition of the internationalist viewpoint, but certainly Phi Beta Kappas should be among the first to realize that these United States cannot long remain an island of plenty in a sea of want and misery; that it is in our self-interest to bring light to the dark places of the earth, which patently means a greatly expanded Point IV program; and that the world can never be safe for democracy until international anarchy has been replaced by order and law and at least some kind of limited government.

Phi Beta Kappa is a fraternity, a brotherhood, but when we quote, as occasionally we do, St. Paul's admonition, "Love the brotherhood," we would do well to recall that the brotherhood which Paul had in mind was a more inclusive one than ours, aye, and a nobler, for it comprehended "Jew and Gentile, Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free." If we can love *that* brotherhood, it seems to me that we are well on our way to wholeness of mind and heart.

The fourth ingredient is one which even the most dourly melancholy among us always thinks he possesses and which invariably is in need of cultivation. It is called a sense of humor, which is another name for a sense of proportion, and it is in poignantly short supply in America and in the world. Indeed, it seems to me our national shame that such phenomena as the grossly ludicrous pretensions of Below-the-Belt Joe McCarthy to the presidency of the United States and the obscene inanities of Colonel Bertie McCormick have not been dissipated to the four winds upon Homeric gales of American laughter.

We tend to forget that demagoguery of the right not only is just as baleful as demagoguery of the left, but that it is just as ridiculous. The demagogue is essentially absurd, and it is the function of the intelligent to laugh at him, not with an intellectual chuckle, but with a gusty roar that shakes the ventral cavity. The demagogue taken seriously is dangerous, but if you

show him forth as the cheap, tawdry clown that he is, you destroy him. Abuse he thrives upon, facts make no impression on him, reason he shrugs off, but ridicule he cannot stand. Therefore, I implore you, laugh at him.

Let me offer you an example of the technique I am seeking to suggest. Early in 1938, when Nazism had a morbid fascination for many Americans, a certain representative of Dr. Goebbels's propaganda ministry, whose name may have been Dr. Wagner, was attached to the German consulate in Cleveland. Dr. Wagner concentrated on college faculty members in the Cleveland area especially those who had German connections or had studied in Germany. He was making good progress, too, until he met the late Colonel William W. Dawson, who was to serve as military governor of an important sector of the American zone of occupation in Germany. By arrangement with another member of the Western Reserve faculty, Dr. Wagner called at the Dawson farm one Sunday afternoon. Because his bees were swarming and required attention, Dawson received his guest in the apiary and exchanged amenities with him just as a new queen was leading her fascist subjects to the hive prepared for them.

"So interesting, Herr Professor Dawson, so interesting," observed Dr. Wagner. "Indeed we have here the Fuehrer principle in nature."

Dawson turned on his most urbane smile. "I shall be interested in a human Fuehrer," he replied, "when you produce one who can lay eggs!"

Dr. Wagner executed a military about-face. He did not look back. Nor did he remain long in Cleveland.

That is the method, my friends. Make them ridiculous. Turn them into figures of fun. If only the job is done well, Below-the-Belt Joe will promptly achieve the obscurity that fairly aches for him, and Bertie will gain the black-out which he would have attained long since had it not been for the accident of inherited wealth.

Humor is, of course, the product of pain dealt with playfully, and it may be used to handle pain in its every aspect, including discomfiture, humiliation, and the actual, as well as the metaphorical, pain in the neck. If you master this engaging art, you will never be a Hitler, or a Napoleon, or a Mussolini, or a Stalin, or a Huey Long, or a McCarthy, or a McCormick, for you will inevitably smile at yourself from time to time. But you will be a civilized person, a joy to your family and your friends, and, in the finest tradition, a good American. Incidentally, can you imagine McCarthy and McCormick laughing even at each other? Neither can I!

I have suggested certain values which at-

tach to the Phi Beta Kappa key, but there are also disadvantages, the seriousness of which will depend largely upon you. You newly initiated members of the society have now taken upon yourselves the stigmata of intellectualism and you will be sneered at, even snarled at, by the ignorant, the envious, the little-minded, the plain nasty.

Again, let me use an anecdote to illustrate my meaning. In the Spring of 1950, I attended, in behalf of United World Federalists, a hearing before one of the committees of the New Jersey legislature then considering a world government resolution. The super-patriotic boys and girls were out in force, among them a woman who said she spoke for a group called "Pro-America." Whether she also was a dear Daughter of the American Revolution I do not know, but she presented a fine set of ugly prejudices, as well as a tidy portfolio of half-truths and plain mendacity. I think that only her peroration need be repeated tonight.

"And do you know what else they've got in this United World Federalist group?" she exclaimed. "Well, I'll tell you what they've got! They've got lots and lots of Phi Beta Kappas!"

The woman could not conceivably have been more vehement if she had been accusing us of kidnapping and matricide. Please don't say that you were not warned of the hazards which confront you.

The intended smear words which the isolationist right and its ultra-right lunatic fringe may apply to you include "intellectual," "one-worlder," "liberal," "leftist," "pink," and, as your detractors become more frantic and less responsible, as well as more judgment-proof, perhaps even "subversive" and "fellow traveler." Since the ultimate smear, "Communist," is libelous *per se*, it probably will not be used, but if any flannel-mouthed demagogue of the right does accuse you of either Communism or communist sympathies, sue him, even though he has no more than a couple of dimes to rub together. If we can catch any such animals in Virginia, I shall be glad to bring the action myself.

I have not yet suggested the most horrendous epithet of all and the one most likely to be applied to you, as a Phi Beta Kappa, however conservative your views may be. The very moment you display the key, you are almost certain to be called an "egg-head." And I shall have to become quasi-classical to indicate the extent of that catastrophe.

In words that never occurred to Horace, "Dura est ovicipitum via." For the benefit of such engineers as may be present, that is a Latin asseveration, and it means, "The way of the egg-head is hard." If you enter-

tain the least shadow of doubt upon the subject, consult Adlai Stevenson.

But don't be too much concerned about all these dire possibilities, my younger friends. In the early days of the New Deal, there were no dirtier smear words than "Wall Street lawyer," "corporation lawyer," and worst of all, "public utility holding company lawyer." They all were applied to me, quite accurately, and I was able to survive, just as you will be able to endure labels which, in most instances, will be thoroughly mendacious. In all events, you will find plenty of good company and good fun on our side of the intellectual tracks.

Incised in the entablature of Clark Hall, which houses the University of Virginia Law School, are these words, "That those alone may be servants of the law who labor with learning, courage, and devotion to preserve liberty and to promote justice." This admonition is, of course, intended primarily for law students, but I believe it may well have a wider application. For how better can we all serve the finest traditions of Phi Beta Kappa than by laboring with learning, courage, and devotion to preserve liberty and to promote justice?

To preserve the liberty which is almost uniquely ours, liberty of thought and opinion and speech, freedom from the imposition of crack-potisms or mental straight-jackets by either the extreme left or the rabid right. And to promote justice—justice administered to the greatest and the least with decency and kindness and respect for personality; justice administered by men of integrity, men of character.

Basic in all this to Phi Beta Kappa and to intellectual life is the free mind: the free mind best described by William Ellery Channing more than 100 years ago. Let me close with his words, even though they are familiar to you, because they have, for me, all the quality of cherished scripture:

I call that mind free which masters the senses, which passes life, not in asking what it shall eat or drink, but in hungering, thirsting, and seeking after righteousness.

I call that mind free which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers, which calls no man master, which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith, which opens itself to light whencesoever it may come, and which receives new truth as an angel from heaven.

I call that mind free which sets no bounds to its love, which is not imprisoned in itself or in a sect, which recognizes in all human beings the image of God and the rights of His children, which delights in virtue and sympathizes with suffering wherever they are seen, which conquers pride, anger, and sloth, and offers itself up a willing victim to the cause of mankind.

I call that mind free which, through confidence in God and in the power of virtue, has cast off all fear but that of wrong-doing, which no menace or peril can enthrall, which is calm in the midst of tumults, and possesses itself though all else be lost.

# Some Factors In the 1952 Election

By CORTEZ A. M. EWING

Regardless of the historical importance of the 1952 election, students of American politics will find in it almost any phenomenon for which they seek. Did it mark the end of the New Deal-Fair Deal era? Was General Eisenhower a Republican or a Democratic candidate? Was the American electorate guilty of infantilism or did it rise up to smite the professional leadership of both parties? Does it represent a partial renunciation of the peach-tinted idealism of the Dumbarton Oaks era? These and many other questions can be asked and contradictory answers obtained after long and careful poring over the final election statistics. Moreover, no election campaign in our history has been studied from so many angles.

The professionals of the labor political front are checking the voting records of labor constituencies with a view to improving political techniques. Intimidated by the debacle of 1948, the professional pollsters groped their way through 1952 with such faltering steps as to leave them with diminished standing in the scholarly world. In 1948, they had simply missed the verdict in a very close election, so close in fact that the redistribution of less than a quarter-million votes would have sent Mr. Truman back to Independence and Mr. Dewey into the "Washington mess." But, in 1952, the pollsters, with their multiple enumerated categories, weren't even sure of the landslide victory. Needless to say, they are refining techniques which proved ineffectual in such divergent political situations. The voter-motivation analysts are now evaluating the post-election interviews with the view of seeking the key to the human animal's apparent delight in misleading the smart young interviewers. Is this enigmatic behavior the mere outcropping of resentment against invasions in the area of privacy? Or is it an evidence of an innate desire to wreck the playhouse, compensated by Max Stirner's egoistic satisfaction at having tossed the proverbial monkey-wrench

into the gears? Or is it that citizens regard politics much more casually than do those who appeal to them to save the country again for another thousand years, or to keep the grass from growing too luxuriantly in the streets of American cities?

And finally, the party professionals are looking at their hole-cards with less assurance than at any time since the Populists rose up to demand the democratization of the party system. Something has been happening in America, a something that gives nightmares to the modern Nashes, Tweeds, and Crumps. The professionals still offer the circus, but the bread is coming from other sources. And man cannot live by circuses alone. He has so many other forms of entertainment, not the least of which is that of voting against the wishes of his self-appointed political mentors. John Fischer explains this persistent erosion of professional leadership as deriving essentially in the progressive suburbanization of America. This reflects an augmentation in the ranks of the middle classes, who regard independence as the ne plus ultra of personal integrity. In a very real sense, Fischer has isolated and analyzed a very important social and political fact.

Bosses were powerful when they were backed by the urban agglomerations of European immigrants, whose understanding of American politics was the result of the professional's own explanations. Naturally, his identification of machine and citizen interests did little to engender revolt among his flock. But the death-knell to this conspiracy was sounded when the national government assumed the responsibility for unemployment relief. When a citizen may eat without the benign approval of the professional, he is on the highway to citizen rather than mere animal integrity. Only a very shallow dip into the soup bowl which is history brings to the surface the conservative criticism that F.D.R. was undermining the moral structure of American democracy. From whence