

## The Knights of Columbus Endowment

An Editorial by Rt. Rev. Mgr. Thomas J. Shahan, D. D.

NO words can carry the message of gratitude due the Knights of Columbus for the great work they have done in the face of the world by founding in the Catholic University at Washington fifty graduate scholarships for young laymen. When every proper memorial of the noble deed has been set up, it will still be true that time alone can create and reveal its fitting reward, the men who in the next generation will be at once the product of this generous foundation and the heralds of its timeliness, its power, and its varied service to the common cause of religion and country.

Loyalty to the See of Peter irradiates strongly the charter of this institute, new and unique among the countless plans and schemes that men have framed since the days of Plato for impressing their ideals and hopes on those who must follow them. Leo XIII and Pius X have pleaded eloquently with the American Catholic people for the proper endowment of a great central Catholic school of learning, and some have taken to heart the paternal and prudent advice of the Vicar of Christ. It remained, however, for the Knights of Columbus to offer the most generous sum yet given to the vast enterprise, and to merit thereby the encomia of the Holy See and of all who reverence in it the voice, the person, the work of Jesus Christ living and acting in the Head of His Holy Church.

For three centuries the English language was the dread enemy of Catholicism and freely conducted, the world over, a savage campaign against all that was dear to the faithful children of the True Church. It was the chief ally of the great religious revolution of the sixteenth century, and reinforced steadily the innate power and charm of a splendid literature by innumerable advantages, political, economic, social, racial, and others. Within fifty years this alliance has been challenged, and partly discredited, but it has not yet been broken. Whoever reflects on the possibilities of a graduate school, properly conducted, in a young and promising university cannot but forecast generations of young men highly equipped and well formed in all the forces that are latent in one's native tongue, when it is gradually fashioned into the most efficient of weapons, amid all the aids and supports that academic peace, leisure and security have always furnished in the past and will surely bestow upon the new foundation.

Living issues, the daily warfare along all the lines of contact with the secular temper, society, and ideals, will naturally come to the front in the studies and formation of the young Knights of Columbus who will henceforth enjoy the advantages of a highly specialized training. Our Catholic faith has certain inalienable rights and interests in the social and political world it has done so much to create and preserve. Prophets and sons of prophets, reformers and agitators of every ilk, crowd hourly to the front and weary sane men with their insistence, that becomes perilous, however, when they appeal to those immemorial passions of Demos that time and again have wrecked states and civilizations or put them on the path of decay. Among so many chosen young men not a few will surely break the high level of their peers and in due time stand up as honored and trusted spokesmen of the Catholic Church on questions and problems which may in their day concern her greatly. Such men have never been wanting in the Catholic countries of Europe, but they usually grew up amid academic and other advantages and imbibed at the fountain head correct philosophy, true history, and that intimate sense of the welfare and interests of Holy Church which comes naturally from a broad training within her most favored precincts. It is true that there have been,



and are yet among us, many self-made and worthy defenders of life, the rights of Catholics and of the Church, but they were and are the first to acknowledge the importance of long and careful training in philosophy and history, in literature and the fine arts, in the political and social sciences, and whatever befits the public defender of his venerable and holy creed.

Patriotism, that passion of all noble souls, will be forever the debtor of a rich academic foundation that yearly draws highly gifted youth to the National Capital, and there furnishes them with a first-hand knowledge of the American State, its history, spirit, and institutions; its providential rise and purpose in the divine plan; its great works and its high ideals. Nowhere else will the national unity and grandeur affect more vividly the imagination, or appeal more potently to the heart.

Nowhere else will the dignity, uses, and responsibility of American citizenship come home to men more directly. The archives of the nation, its documents and monuments, the materials of its history, are within easy reach, and the daily open discussion of its vast interests keeps every mind alert and keen, sharpens the powers of observation, and exercises the judgment.

It is character, after all, that lends to every man his peculiar use and distinction in the social order. Nor is there any period more important in its formation than the years of early manhood, when the real conflict takes place in the spirit of each young man that decides usually his place and influence among his fellow men. Only the future can tell how well inspired were the Knights of Columbus when they provided for so many chosen youths, the large and pleasant conditions amid which their judgment could ripen in contact with professors of distinction and devotion, amid opportunities for wider reading, for a deeper grasp of the laws of logic and the true nature and purpose of life, man, society, the family, the state.

Character is furthermore purified and steeled by a hearty conviction of the need and uses of religion, of its true history and perfection in Jesus Christ, and by the studied cultivation and refinement of all the higher instincts of the Catholic heart. Perhaps it is through this happy function of the noble foundation that it will reach the acme of its efficiency.

Let me close this cordial recognition of the unique generosity of the Knights of Columbus, individual and corporate, with the reflexion that in this splendid educational achievement the young Order has done itself an honor that no external agency could equal. It has set a shining mark that cannot fail to rivet the attention of all minds interested in the great things of life, the things that count for the unborn generations, and in turn inspire them to do in their own day and way signal and resounding deeds for the highest welfare of the Catholic Church and the United States. Each Knight is henceforth great with the greatness of his collective work, and influential, with the influence of a moral force whose sources are the entire Order, but whose results must be sought for in all time and throughout humanity.

Thomas J. Shahan