

SCIENCE

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SIGMA XI AND THE FUTURE¹

Members of Sigma Xi, Initiates and Guests:

For many years it has been the custom in our chapter upon the occasion which each year corresponds to this, for the president of the chapter to read an address in order to explain the more clearly to those whom we are honored to receive into membership the spirit of Sigma Xi. In some instances this address has taken the form of a description of a piece of research; in others a general statement of the function of Sigma Xi in furthering the cause of research. Much as I should like to be relieved of the honor of addressing you this evening, I feel that it would ill become me to change so time-honored a custom. And accordingly I beg your indulgence while I discuss some of the problems and the obligations before Sigma Xi, at least as I see them. This subject seems to me to be particularly appropriate just now because of the uncertainty of the conditions to be met in the new era, into which, we are all agreed, we are entering.

First, however, permit me to review briefly the history of Sigma Xi—this with the double purpose of acquainting our new members with the origin and development of the society which, to-night, they are joining, and of furnishing a foundation upon which logically to discuss the problems before us. For we must build the future upon the experience of the past.

To those of us whose educational home is Cornell, Sigma Xi has a peculiar significance, for it was here, thirty-three years ago, namely in 1886, that the society was founded, and it is from here that the society has spread, until now chapters are found in nearly every large institution of learning in the country. How was it that these young men, in this

¹ Presidential address before the Alpha (Cornell) Chapter of Sigma Xi, May 17, 1919, upon the occasion of the initiation of new members.

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