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Boy Scouts and War Work

No record of the Great War would be complete without some chronicle of the work done by the Boy Scouts. Organizations of this special character stand out from other boys' societies in that they exist in every civilized nation in the world. What is here recorded of our own boys will probably be true of all.

I was present at the first review of Boy Scouts at the Crystal Palace, at Sydenham in 1909, also that at Windsor in 1911—and at the last at Birmingham in 1913. At this rally there were present Patrols from all the "Dominions over the seas," from France, Russia, America, Belgium, Spain, Holland, Germany, and other countries, and this brought home to me the catholicity of the movement and a promise in the future of the brotherhood of nations through and by this great company of the youth of the world. Only to-day I learn that Japan has sent a special commissioner, Count Yoshinori Futara, Commissioner of the Prefecture en Disponibilite, to report to his Government upon the methods and working of this movement in England with a view of its adoption by the State in Japan.

That this boys' movement has justified its existence and proved beyond the possibility of dispute the value of the ethical education given under its auspices, is shown by the extraordinarily diversified work performed by the youngsters and the way in which it was and is being conducted. Two years ago I was speaking of the Scout movement to a military official, when he remarked "That he did not know what they would have done at the beginning of the war without them," and the Prime Minister has only quite

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recently said of them: "It is perhaps only since the beginning of the war, during these three years of constant drain upon the manhood of our nation, that we have come to realize the great value of the movement inaugurated six years before. We all know now the meaning of the motto represented by the initials B. P., and which has been lived up to with such sincerity and success. I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that the young boyhood of our country, represented by the Boy Scouts Association, shares the laurels for having been prepared with the old and trusted British Navy and Army * * * It is no small matter to be proud of that the Scouts were able within a month of the outbreak of the war to give the most intelligent and energetic help in all kinds of service. When the boyhood of a nation can give such practical proof * * * there is not much danger of that nation going under foot * * I can only say to all sections—go forward; stick to it to the end." This in itself is sufficient vindication of the position that the movement has acquired in the eyes of the public. It is difficult without being verbose to enumerate the multifarious duties undertaken by them, and a remark which I overheard, made to a much harassed Government official by a friend of his, will give point to this. He was trying to find somebody to do something and exclaimed, "Who on earth can I get for this job?" "Oh, don't worry," replied his friend, "Call in the Boy Scouts—they'll do it!"

At the beginning of the war the Scouts turned out, without waiting for a call, to guard the railways, telegraph and telephone wires, bridges, and to do watching on the coast. It will be remembered what a scare there was about this time of poisoning the water by German spies—so the Boy Scouts came and camped by the sides of all reservoirs in and about London. And a weird sight they presented at night on the banks with their tents and fires. Also the movement supplied almost all the buglers and signallers to Kitchener's New Army, of which there was a great shortage; and more recently the movement was asked to supply signallers for Salonica for use between the shore and the ships that had been torpedoed. They were also employed as guides and messengers at all the great railway termini

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until relieved of this duty by the National Volunteers, which body had sprung into existence.

Scoutmasters and Assistant Scoutmasters immediately volunteered for active service, leaving their troops in the hands of their patrol leaders to carry on until they came home. Alas! the roll of honour of these men is heavy indeed, and nothing remains but the effect of their work and their memory to the troops so well and lovingly tended. The Navy, Air Service, and Army received large numbers of the older Scouts, and the general opinion of the authorities of their training and character is expressed in the terse request; "Send us more of them!" Many distinctions have been won by Scouts, the two most prominent being that of Scout Jack Travers Cornwell, V.C., the sailor boy who stuck to his gun, although himself mortally wounded, with the gun's crew lying dead and wounded round him, for the simple reason as stated by him: "In case I might be wanted!"; the other of Lieut. Reginald Haine, H.A.A., V.C., King's Scout of the Petersham Troop, of whom the official report says that: "Throughout these operations this Officer's superb courage, quick decision, and calm judgment were beyond all praise, and it was his splendid personal example which inspired his men to continue their efforts during more than thirty hours of continuous fighting."

The voluntary and semi-voluntary work taken up by the Scouts was the cause of two War Service badges being issued by Headquarters to mark their recognition of the boys' patriotism. We find them acting as messengers at the War Office, the Admiralty, the Red Cross, and most, if not all, of the Colonial and Government offices; the various patriotic societies were greatly indebted to them, and even private firms would have Scouts before any other boys. Then we have numberless reports of Boy Scouts who undertook such work as "Good Turns," as keeping gardens going during the absence of the men of the house at the front; of helping in the houses of such and looking after young children thus left alone; wherever and whenever there were charitable shows, bazaars, or what not, there were also found the Boy Scouts always busy—the handy men who

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were ready to undertake any work within their capacity to perform. At the various canteens of the Y.M.C.A., in England and France still Scouts and more Scouts—indeed, the Scouts themselves are running more than one hut in France. Local authorities have accepted their offers of work for the purpose of clearing the streets from snow and for other such work. In large towns, such as Liverpool, their labour has been organized for the collection of bottles, tins, and waste paper with extraordinary results.

On the land they have been employed in almost every capacity suitable to a boy's strength. One will find them in munition works and all Government factories, and everywhere, with few exceptions, giving good account of themselves. Even as I am writing I catch glimpses of the familiar uniform flitting up and down the passage outside my office door—for it is a characteristic of the Boy Scout that he gets a "move on him" and does not dawdle in getting from one point to another; he has learned to obey an order "at the double" and not "at the dawdle" as is the manner of the "mere" boy!

The Government at a fairly recent conference on the problem of infantile crime requested the Scouts to come to its assistance and help stem the tide during the war by taking into the various Troops as many of the other boys as could be with safety done, and still more recently a magistrate suggested that boys coming out from a reformatory school should be compelled to enter a Troop of Scouts whose influence might have the desired effect of helping such to "make good."

The Scouts are also being employed on board liners and transports, and have here as elsewhere made good their position, as witness the incident on the *Britannique*—the hospital ship which met with disaster in the Mediterranean. An order was given that the women and Scouts were to take to the boats. The women were got off, but the Scouts refused to leave, saying that their duty was on the ship. When the ship at last listed so badly that they, as everyone else, had to go it was necessary for them to slide down the ropes—a distance of fifty feet. The master-at-arms, speak-

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ing of the whole incident, said: "I expected to have to 'shepherd' them, but they did everything as if they were doing boat drill!"

At present they have broken out into a fresh place, and are being employed by the military authorities in cutting bracken for use as litter in place of straw, which has become both scarce and dear. Five camps have been formed. Tents and other camp impedimenta are supplied by the authorities, who have done all they can for the boys' comfort, but the catering is done by the Scoutmasters in charge, and the cooking by the Scouts themselves. The boys put in an eight-hour day, and work in three groups. The first cuts down the bracken, the second rakes it up, and the third loads the carts. I am informed through the report from the O.C. of the district that the work, discipline and catering was quite satisfactory. This is, I think, a very fair record for one organization, the youngest of all, and one that it may well be proud of.

But a cold recital of facts, however long and convincing, hardly brings out the extraordinary hold upon the imagination and affectionate regard of the public for the Scouts. It matters not to whom one speaks, nor yet where one sees the Scouts, familiar as they have become, we find the same pride of them, the same interest in their movements, the same good word for them. I was reading, the other day, a letter of thanks to a Troop of Scouts from the secretary of a society, in which he expressed his own and the members' thanks and appreciation of their useful and intelligent assistance to a First Aid Class, by some twenty of their number—for although they primarily had gone as "patients" for bandaging, in practice they had also been able to teach—and this as a "good turn," for a period of over three months. A Troop was seen by a lady coming into a village near which they were about to camp. She came up and asked the Scoutmaster if his boys wanted a place for swimming; on receiving an answer in the affirmative, the lady at once placed her lake, grounds, and garage at their disposal, saying that it was a pleasure to be able to do anything for the Scouts, as they did so much for other people. That same

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Troop had several callers at their camp from the neighbourhood, all anxious to do what they could for them, thus showing their high regard for the movement. A small boy had fallen and cut his head somewhat severely. He was found weeping by two or three Scouts out for a ramble; they comforted him, washed and bound up his head, and took him home. The next day the father and mother called at the camp to personally thank the Scouts, bringing with them a large cake as a thank-offering, for as they explained, the boys had refused even apples. When they left, the mother remarked: "No wonder the Scouts are loved so much; I had often wondered why, now I know!" It is this intimate relationship established upon altruistic principles between them and the public which is the secret of their success, and so long as they work along these lines of being "useful and helping other people at all times," for the love of doing good, just so long will they succeed, thus following in the footsteps of the greatest philosopher of all time, Who "went about doing good."

It will be as well to add a note of warning to the public. There are many boys who have bought jobs on the strength of it, passing themselves off, to the uninitiated, as Boy Scouts; there are also, I regret to add, boys who have been turned out of Troops, and who yet have both badges and uniform, at the same game. These, or some of them, have brought great discredit upon the movement, and I would impress upon possible employers of Boy Scouts to obtain a letter from the boy's Scoutmaster certifying that he has a right to wear the uniform. A reference from other people is of no use in this connection.

—"HAWKEYE" IN "THE FIELD."

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