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A BOY SCOUT STORY

CONTRIBUTED

(continued from last week)

It was just at this time that there fell into my hands—some people would say providentially—a little pamphlet called "The Boy Scout Scheme." It told all about the organization, well known and much exploited since that time—"The Boy Scouts of America."

I took the pamphlet to my room, after the Boy was in bed, and studied it from cover to cover, as Columbus might have studied a map of the new world, could he have gotten his hands on such a thing.

The pamphlet had very little about mothers in it; significantly little. It dealt direct with the boy's world and interests. The boy's home was not once, I think, mentioned in it, but there was a deal about "scoutcraft," "woodcraft," "campercraft" and the like,—words I had never put together before,—and something, too, about good citizen ship.

I pored over it, but I did not let the boy know this. On the contrary, I gave it to him the next morning with little show of interest. "Here is a pamphlet that was sent me to advertise the 'Boy Scouts,'" I said; "but you will probably understand it better than I do."

I saw his eye run over the lines. In a moment he was absorbed in it. Here was something to which his fingers felt familiar. He turned the pages a good deal, as you or I might feel a piece of silk or linen to judge of the quality.

That afternoon when he joined the "gang," there went with him the pamphlet concerning the Boy Scouts.

I told you that I am generally considered a clever woman. In vindication of the term I now tell you that I never so much as mentioned the Boy Scouts to him, and I kept my hands off.

Shortly after the Boy sent thirty precious cents to Scout headquarters for a Scout Manual. It was with him day and night. I am moderately certain he slept with it under his pillow. I sent for one myself, taking care the Boy should not know I had done so and I read it with a critical eye.

There were places in it that seemed to me a good deal clatter, a kind of playing at make-believe; something here and there which, to my way of thinking, is forced or cheap and useless; something which lacks sense and sincerity. Maybe this is merely a woman's native misunderstanding and misapprehension of a man's world, but I am telling you frankly the impression the whole thing made on me. I did not like the "dramatics" of it. I found about that time, quite a little in the magazines, too, about the organization, and I remember reading with a good deal of disgust how the Scout-master sometimes pretended to be badly hurt and pretends to faint, so that, thus fooling the boys, he had better give them a genuine (!) lesson in first aid to the injured. I read that one leader pretended to be lost in some big stretch of woods, so that the boys would get the genuine lost-in-the-woods scare, such as the wilderness pioneers had; and there were other such accounts.

All of this, as well as many other minor details of the Scout movement I disapproved of, do still disapprove of thoroughly. I thought them then and I still think them, cheap and unworthy; but in that Manual, as I read it, there were pages, too, that glowed with the light from a boy's own world. Also, there was the page of Scout laws, reading which, something in me got to its feet and saluted as a cadet salutes a superior officer.

On page 10 of the Scout Manual there is to be found the following: THE TWELVE POINTS OF THE SCOUT LAW.

1. A Scout is trustworthy
2. A Scout is loyal
3. A Scout is helpful
4. A Scout is friendly
5. A Scout is courteous
6. A Scout is kind

7. A Scout is obedient
8. A Scout is cheerful
9. A Scout is thrifty
10. A Scout is brave
11. A Scout is clean
12. A Scout is reverent

I had hoped my boy would be all these things, and had so admonished him. But these are Scout laws, mind you, not advice and admonitions, not hopes backed by maternal pleadings and fears, but laws, self imposed when the Scout takes his oath; for in taking the oath he promises to obey these laws. That settled it. If the Scout movement stood for these things, and inspired and exacted them, I was with it heart and soul.

I have not told you that the "gang" had by this time joined. Well of course they had. They were Scouts now. I believe they joined the organization very soon after the Boy received the Manual.

It took some little time for them to get things going. The right Scout master was not easy to choose. The boys found it hard to agree. Finally their choice rested on a young fellow who was working his way through law school. He had some Indian blood in him, and the boys thrust on him the honor and, it may be added the labor of being their Scout master. From then on the Scouts met twice a week. From the start the whole thing was a great success. The Boy, for one, benefited immensely by the association. It would take me too long to tell you how much. I only tell you humbly that some of the faults in him which I had worked with for years, such as selfishness, shiftlessness, occasional cowardice, and sometimes irreverence, began to disappear, and without fret or friction. A good Scout had none of these faults: they are against the Scout law. He was trying to be a good Scout; that was all.

(To be continued.)

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