VOLUNTEER CITIZENS: THE YOUNG PEACE ARMY OF AMERICA AS DEVELOPED THROUGH THE BOY SCOUTS: BY S. A. MOFFAT

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HERE is something peculiarly stirring about the vision of a band of young people gathered together for a great common cause. How our sympathies were roused, back in the old schooldays, by that thirteenth-century story of the Children’s Crusade! How our imagination was kindled by the thought of those fifty thousand little volunteers who, inspired by the great wave surging over Europe, left their homes in France and Germany and set forth, unarmed but unafraid, for Jerusalem, to win back the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the conquering Saracens!

We are far removed, today, from such old-time fanaticism. Our religion, as Dr. Frank Crane once remarked, is a matter not of incense but of soap. While we still have our fighters, they are men and women who are concerned with the cleansing of our social and civic systems rather than with relics of the past. But even now the New World has its counterpart of that eager army. We find our modern young crusaders in the Camp Fire Girls and the Boy Scouts of America—two youthful, enthusiastic bands that have spread across a whole continent their ideals of helpful comradeship and practical achievement.

The value to the nation of these organizations as builders of a conscious citizenship is evident when one sees how closely the young people’s interests are linked with those of the community. This is particularly significant in the case of the Boy Scouts, whose active share in civic and State activities has become, during the last few years, a really vital and progressive factor in many sections of the country.

The Boy Scouts are three hundred thousand strong, not counting the eight thousand scout masters and assistant scout masters. Everyone knows in a general way, what they stand for—their camps and sports and outdoor activities, the badges and honors awarded for special attainments in education, industry and art. But less well known is the work they do in cooperation with city and State officials to promote the cleanliness, health and happiness of the people in their own particular neighborhood, to aid the State in forestry, bird and animal conservation, and to volunteer their services wherever they can aid the cause of public welfare.

An organization of boys and young men who are willing and eager thus to translate their ideals and theories into definite terms of action, to sacrifice their own comfort and leisure for the general good, is no small asset to the nation, and it is worth while to glance a moment
at a few of the ways in which the boys have accomplished their work.

In the cities and towns all over the country, Boy Scouts who wish to taste the adventures and responsibilities of active citizenship go to the mayor and ask how they can help. The mayor is pretty sure to be interested by their boyish eagerness, and sets them gladly to work. He gets his public health officers and his policemen to cooperate with the Scouts in whatever undertaking seems most needful. They start, for instance, with a general “clean-up” campaign. The city is divided into districts, each in charge of a scout master, who, in turn, marks off sub-districts, placing each in charge of a scout patrol. They make tours of inspection and report to the board of health all places where there is uncollected garbage, stagnant water, unsightly vacant lots and ill-kept backyards and alleys. Then they take the health officers around and help them clean up the city, thereby not only learning a lesson themselves in civic sanitation and management, but stimulating in even the most indifferent members of the population a desire for hygiene and beauty. On one occasion the New York branch of the Boy Scouts had a “clean-up” campaign, and boys from certain troops went to the Ghetto and other East-side sections. They were so energetic in clearing away refuse and debris from backyards, roofs and fire escapes that the people themselves became interested and gave most enthusiastic aid.

In some cities, anti-fly campaigns were started by the Scouts, and in one place, in Canada, they accomplished wonders with the help of the cabmen. In New York, this work has been done in cooperation with the City Board of Health and the Museum of Natural History. Posters were printed and distributed, and moving pictures were made showing the ravages of flies as carriers of disease, instructing people how to get rid of them by poison and traps, and how to prevent their breeding. All over the country, the Scouts visited owners of livery stables and dirty backyards, and persuaded them to sign blanks promising that, with the aid of the Boy Scouts, they would clean up their premises, get rid of manure, garbage, etc., and do their share in the movement toward cleaner cities. The results were well worth the efforts.

The protection of milk, meat and other foods from dust and flies is another matter to which the Boy Scouts give their attention, for they know that unprotected eatables are a source of danger to the public health. They find out what laws have been passed in their town or district for such protection, and how the people are living up to the laws. If there are no regulations of this kind, their investigations are often influential in creating a demand for proper legislation.
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The fighting of actual disease is another phase of Boy Scout activity, and cooperating with health societies and hospitals they distribute posters describing the dangers of unhealthy environment, impure food, and the precautions that should be taken to avoid contagion. In a number of the smaller towns, the boys who have studied "first aid" are allowed by the police to take a practical part in caring for injured persons and warning people on matters of public safety. During conventions, some of the Scouts also frequent the railroad stations, meet trains and act as guides to visiting strangers.

Bird protection is likewise encouraged among the Boy Scouts of America, and those who are interested in the wild feathered life of their district build sanctuaries and bird boxes in the parks and woodlands at the outskirts of the towns. Dr. Hornaday, of the Zoological Gardens of New York, finds the Scouts are active helpers in this field, and, as the camera takes the place of the gun with this young army, a good example is set to all the boys of the neighborhood.

The State of New Jersey has organized fish and game patrols of Boy Scouts, and has given them pins or medals denoting that they are deputy game wardens. The boys report any breaking of the rules for protection of fish and animals, distribute literature, and are of general assistance on the grounds. California is also taking up this work, and no doubt before long other States will follow suit.

In forestry the Boy Scouts are particularly valuable, and already seven States have availed themselves of this volunteer assistance. Michigan, in nineteen hundred and eleven, formed what was known as the Michigan Forest Scouts, and the State fire warden and deputy were both Boy Scout men. The boys study the laws in regard to forestry, and when proficient are given badges denoting that they are Forest Scouts and deputy fire wardens. They report all fires they happen to see, and as the country is connected by telephones they can communicate with the nearest warden and help him put out fires.

The value of this volunteer work to Michigan is shown by the following facts. In nineteen hundred and eleven, the loss from forest fires was one million, five hundred thousand dollars in that State alone. Two years later, however, the total loss was only two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars, and the improvement was attributed mainly to the boys. Moreover, the loss was covered by the work of the Scouts in reforestation, for they set out a great many trees supplied by the State. West Virginia and New Hampshire are both especially interested in this work. These are only a few of the means by which the Boy Scouts of America are helping their country in her peaceful but strenuous fight for greater health, efficiency and happiness in town and village, meadow and forest land.