



The **BOY SCOUTS**
as
COUNTY FAIR GUIDES
SCOUT MASTER ROBERT SHALER

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THE BOY SCOUTS AS COUNTY FAIR GUIDES

BY
SCOUT MASTER ROBERT SHALER

AUTHOR OF "BOY SCOUTS OF THE SIGNAL CORPS," "BOY SCOUTS OF PIONEER CAMP," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE LIFE SAVING CREW," "BOY SCOUTS ON PICKET DUTY," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE FLYING SQUADRON," "BOY SCOUTS AND THE PRIZE PENNANT," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE NAVAL RESERVE," "BOY SCOUTS IN THE SADDLE," "BOY SCOUTS FOR CITY IMPROVEMENT," "BOY SCOUTS IN THE GREAT FLOOD," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE FIELD HOSPITAL," "BOY SCOUTS WITH THE RED CROSS," ETC.

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The Boy Scouts as County Fair Guides.

CHAPTER I. BACK FROM THE FISHING HOLE.

“You know, boys, a whole lot depends on what kind of weather we have during Fair week!”

“How about that, Arthur? You’re the weather-wise scout of Oakvale Troop.”

“Yes, give us your forecast, Arthur; has the rain let up for keeps?”

“So far as that goes, Alec, I notice in the morning paper it’s turned clear all the way from the Rockies east, and that ought to mean a good spell of several days for us.”

“Unless one of those howlers comes twisting up the Atlantic coast from the West Indies; you want to remember that the hurricane season isn’t quite over yet.”

“Nothing of the kind in sight, and I always look up every scrap of weather news in the papers.”

“You make me happy when you say that, Arthur, old weather sharp. We get our afternoons off from school while the County Fair is on, because it’s such a big thing for Oakvale and vicinity. I’m trying to figure out what I can do to have a cracking good time of it.”

“So are we all, Tom, but there’s no use trying to hike off somewhere with the whole troop. You can’t do much on an afternoon. Why couldn’t they have fixed it so we would get free the last half of the week, including Saturday?”

“Tell that to the school directors, Alec. Perhaps they’ll take pity on you and change the programme. I doubt it, though. I reckon they want the boys to be around while the Fair is going on.”

“I’ve figured out that my scheme is to hang around the Exhibition and see the aëroplane man do his stunts every afternoon; but I’d rather be in camp any day.”

The three boys whose chatter opens this chapter had been tramping along the main road leading into the town of Oakvale, where they all lived. It was on a Saturday afternoon in early fall. That the lads had been spending part of their holiday in fishing was in plain evidence, for besides carrying either bamboo poles or jointed rods, they dangled strings of yellow perch, some of the catch being of extraordinary size.

On their way home the boys had stopped to scan a highly-colored poster on a billboard at the side of the road, where people in the passing trains nearby could also have the benefit of the information thus blazoned forth.

About this time every year the big County Fair was held on the extensive grounds near the thriving town of Oakvale. If wonderful promises meant anything at all the coming exhibition of live stock, farm products, and the like would far surpass anything heretofore attempted.

Besides, there would be racing on the track, amazing feats undertaken by an aëroplane aviator of national renown, balloon ascensions accompanied by parachute drops, “and other attractions too numerous to mention.”

Having looked over the poster and commented on its most prominent features, the trio of weary lads again turned their faces toward home, now not half a mile away.

It might be noticed that all of them wore rather faded suits of khaki, showing that they belonged to the local troop of Boy Scouts. In addition to the ordinary badges they also proudly displayed certain merit badges to prove that they had qualified along certain particular lines of scoutcraft.

Another thing that might have been noticed was that Alec, Tom and Arthur all displayed bronze medals, which would tell anyone acquainted with scout customs and laws that these lads had saved human life at some time in their past.

While, after rather an exhausting day, they are trudging slowly toward home with heavy feet, it may be a good time for us to take a glimpse into the past, in order to understand just who the three boys are, and also mention a few important things in connection with the troop to which they belong.

The town of Oakvale lay in the East, and not a great many miles away from the Atlantic Ocean. Those who have read previous volumes in the series know just why scout affairs were booming in the town. The scout master, Lieutenant Denmead, a retired army officer, took the greatest delight in fostering a spirit of manliness among the boys in his charge. His assistant, Hugh Hardin, who was also the leader of the Wolf Patrol, chanced to be a wide-awake chap, and just the kind to push any enterprise along to success.

The troop now consisted of five patrols, and as a rule they were filled to their utmost capacity of eight members each. The Wolf had been first in the field, but as the interest grew and new members joined, there had arisen the Hawk, Otter, Fox and Owl Patrols.

Alec Sands was leader of the Otter, and had at one time been a keen rival of Hugh Hardin; but all hard feelings were eventually buried, and they were warm friends. Arthur Cameron proudly carried the patrol colors of the Wolf; and while interested in wireless telegraphy, weather predictions, and even photography, perhaps his strongest point lay in his surprising skill in amateur surgery and first aid to the injured.

Tom Sherwood was also an Otter, and a husky fellow, fond of water sports, and with a hobby along the lines of surveying work.

It can be readily seen from a casual glance at some of the titles of previous books in the series that the boys of Oakvale Troop had passed through considerable experience well worth while.

Since the opportunity to investigate for themselves is open to all readers who would like to learn more about these interesting phases of their past, there is no necessity for our taking up much space here in mentioning details.

Still, it might not be amiss to say that in the preceding spring, during the time of the heavy rains, Hugh and several others of the troop proved themselves to be of exceedingly great value to the citizens of a town in another part of the State. This was when a disastrous flood threatened the community with destruction, and human lives were placed in deadly peril by the quickly rising water.

On that occasion Hugh had actually saved a boy of the town who would otherwise have been carried down with the bridge. His act had been witnessed by hundreds of people, and is talked about to the present day as a fine example

of presence of mind and prompt action.

On account of having thus saved a human life at great risk to himself, Hugh Hardin had received from Headquarters a gold medal, the highest honor that any scout can ever hope to gain. Being a very modest fellow, however, Hugh did not often wear this token of appreciation, though he was proud of it all the same.

It may interest the new reader to know just how Alec, Tom and Arthur came by the bronze medals they wore. During the preceding summer the main part of the troop had gone camping, and it happened that at the time there was a strike of laborers in a large cement works not far distant. When the company imported strike-breakers, and employed guards to protect the property, the foreign strikers grew furious.

So it came about that there was a serious riot during which many of the ignorant strikers were shot. It might have been called a one-sided battle, for a dozen men, and some women as well, were more or less seriously injured.

In this terrible crisis Hugh Hardin and some of his scouts came on the scene. With the usual promptness that characterized his actions, Hugh had started a temporary field hospital. Having learned the first principles of caring for gunshot wounds he and Arthur, assisted by others of the troop, managed to stop the flow of blood in such a way that when the Red Cross surgeon and nurses reached the scene later on, they declared that the work of the scouts merited the highest praise. Indeed, they went even further, and said that were it not for the prompt aid afforded by the young surgeons one or more lives might have been lost.

And since those wise gentlemen at the head of the great movement for the uplift of boys are always quick to recognize real merit, a bronze medal had soon come to every member of Oakvale Troop who had been instrumental in the work of that field hospital.

Since that time things had gone as usual. Some of the boys had gone on summer vacations. Those who remained at home fished, went swimming, played baseball, tennis, and even camped for a week.

Then school had brought back the absent ones, and once more scout affairs began to pick up. Thanksgiving would be the next little breathing spell. At present, the School Board had decided that during the time of the County Fair there was to be only a morning session for all the scholars. Of course, this was

intended as a means for letting them attend the Exhibition, and acquiring more or less knowledge along many lines; for Oakvale was proud of having been chosen as the regular site for this yearly Fair.

“I want to tell you that I’m not sorry to be so near home,” Tom Sherwood observed, after they had arrived at the border of the town, where the break-up of the little fishing party would take place.

“But we haven’t been wasting our day, understand,” added Alec, as he held up his fine string of perch and noticed that one of them still showed signs of life, in spite of the fact that they had tried to knock each captive on the head when taken so as to avoid needless suffering, as every true scout should do.

“Who’s that hurrying this way, and waving his hat?” demanded Arthur. “Looks like Billy Worth—yes, there isn’t another fellow in the troop with his width.”

“And his capacity for making away with the grub when in camp, you want to add,” laughed Tom. “But he certainly looks excited, fellows. Listen to him giving the Wolf call, will you? I wonder if anything can have happened here in town since we started fishing this morning?”

The very idea quickened their footsteps, and in another minute they were joined by the stout lad with the jolly face, who was one of the original members of Oakvale Troop, as well as a staunch supporter and admirer of his patrol leader, Hugh Hardin.

“Billy the Wolf,” as Billy Worth was sometimes called, seemed to have been running, for he was a little short of breath.

“What’s all this mean, Billy?” asked Alec, with something of his old imperiousness, for once upon a time Alec had been of a domineering nature. “Tell us why you’re stopping us on the highway like this? Has there been a fire? Is the school burned to the ground? Anybody sick, a runaway happened, a child lost in the woods and the scouts needed to find it? Speak up, can’t you? and relieve this fierce strain.”

“Why, it’s this way, fellows,” said Billy, between gulps, “the Fair management has asked the Oakvale Scouts to pitch a tent on the grounds, show people how they live in camp, act as guides to strangers in town, meet trains at the station, set up an emergency cot in another tent where first aid to the injured can be

found, and—and, pretty much run the whole business this year! What d’ye think of that now for a big honor to Oakvale Troop?”

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT UNDERTAKING.

There was a brief interval after Billy had blurted out this astonishing news. The other three scouts stared at one another as though they could hardly grasp the full significance of the information.

Then, as if a signal had been given, every one of them dropped his fishpole and string of finny trophies, snatched off his hat, and, waving it above his head, let out a series of cheers.

A mule that had been feeding in a lot near by kicked up his heels and started galloping wildly about his enclosure, doubtless under the impression that war had been declared, and the initial battle begun. A stray cur, in the act of skulking past, sped furiously down the road, evidently believing that it could almost hear the clatter of a tin can tied to its tail, though of course, scouts are never guilty of such a cruel proceeding.

“That’s great news you’ve given us, Billy!” declared Alec. “I can see that the good people of our home town pin a lot of faith in Oakvale Troop of Boy Scouts.”

“Well, they ought to,” said Billy promptly. “We’ve certainly been a credit to the community,—excuse my blushes, boys. But our record speaks for itself, you know.”

“Yes,” added Tom Sherwood, “and only for the scouts, Oakvale to-day would be the same dirty little old town it used to be, with waste paper blowing all around, and nobody taking any pride in keeping things spic and span. The women all said they had tried to clean up and failed; but when our troop offered to lend a helping hand the improvement was effected.”

“It’s too near supper time to do much talking about the wonderful news you’ve brought us, Billy,” said Arthur. “I suppose it’ll be the main line of topic of discussion at the regular weekly meeting to-night.”

“Yes,” said Billy, “and Hugh means to ’phone every member he can reach, so there’ll be a heavy attendance. The Fair begins on Wednesday, you remember, and we ought to know just what we expect to do along a dozen lines.”

“It strikes me as an elegant thing,” asserted Alec.

“Finest that ever came down the pike,” Billy agreed. “To think what glorious times we can have, and how we’ll be able to scatter seeds of information about scout activities among the rubes who attend the great Fair. Some of them really believe scouts are banded together just to play pranks and have fun. We’ll have the biggest opportunity to take the scales off their eyes.”

“And to think, Billy,” Arthur commented, his eyes sparkling, “that while we walked along the road just now all of us were trying to figure out what possible use only afternoon vacations could be to boys, when it was impossible to go off on any hike. Now we can see a dozen ways where we’ll be able to have a good time.”

Billy laughed.

“Yes, we all know what *you’d* call a good time, Arthur,” he jeered. “Chances are you’ll stick by that emergency tent hospital like a leech, and almost hope some old farmer may drop a pitchfork on his foot and need attending to; or a dog bite a boy who’s been badgering him, so you’ll have to cauterize the wound.”

“That’s right,” added Alec. “Arthur is never so happy as when he’s making other people miserable—of course, you understand what I mean. In reality he’s trying to relieve their suffering and danger, even if it does hurt. But I must get along, boys; it’s six o’clock, and we have supper promptly at half-past. I’m as hungry as a wolf, if any of you know what that means.”

“Most of us think it means Billy the Wolf!” laughed Arthur, as he too started off, headed for home, dangling his hard-earned string of perch at his side.

The meeting that night was well attended, for if there had been any dubious ones who had fancied at one time they were really too tired after a holiday to come

out, the urgent message from Hugh Hardin over the wire had changed their minds.

It happened that Lieutenant Denmead was out of town on some business connected with a deceased brother's estate, so that the burden of responsibility during the ensuing week was bound to fall upon the shoulders of the assistant scout master.

Not a single boy doubted the ability of Hugh Hardin to fulfill the demands of the occasion. They had seen him tested on many a field, and it was the almost universal opinion, in which Lieutenant Denmead himself joined, that Hugh could manage things even better than the regular scout master himself.

Considering that there was considerable sickness in town (a number of boys were laid up with mumps and kindred ailments), the attendance at the meeting was creditable.

The old reliable Wolf Patrol carried off the honors of the occasion, for every member answered the roll-call; the Otter was next in line, showing six present.

As some of these boys will figure more or less in the pages of our story it may be wise to mention the list of those at the meeting:

Wolf Patrol—Hugh Hardin (leader), Billy Worth, Bud Morgan, Arthur Cameron, Ned Twyford, Jack Durham, Harold Tremaine and Ralph Kenyon.

Otter Patrol—Alec Sands (leader), Buck Winter, Chester Brownell, Dick Bellamy, Tom Sherwood and Dane Evans.

Fox Patrol—Don Miller (leader), "Shorty" McNeil, Cooper Fennimore, Spike Welling, "Monkey" Stallings.

Owl Patrol—Lige Corbley (leader), "Whistling" Smith, Andy Wallis and Pete Craig.

Hawk Patrol—Walter Osborne (leader), Blake Merton, Gus Merrivale and Anthony Huggins.

After the regular business of the meeting had been hurriedly dispatched, twenty-seven scouts then started in to talk matters over. Of course most of them were

perfectly willing that others should lay out the plans and offer suggestions. It is just as well that a few leading spirits should manage things, for with the whole twenty-seven trying to make themselves heard, Bedlam would have been a quiet retreat beside that meeting.

Hugh had evidently given the matter considerable thought since receiving word from the directors and managers of the County Fair that an invitation was extended to the troop to take charge of certain branches of industry and usefulness.

“The first thing every one of us must do,” Hugh told them, “will be to brush up our knowledge of what the Fair stands for, and the location of every exhibit. For to be a guide means that people expect you are a walking encyclopedia, and you’re apt to have all sorts of queer questions fired at you.”

“Yes, I guess that’s right, Hugh,” said Walter Osborne, “because there will be lots of people here who are utter strangers to Oakvale. I know that my Uncle Reuben and Aunt Ruth are coming on to stop over with us, and while I visited at their place as a kid years ago, they’ve never been here before. There are others, too, I’ve heard, so each one of you wants to kiss the Blarney Stone, and be ready to talk like a Dutch uncle.”

“On Tuesday afternoon after school, then, we’ll go out to the grounds and get our two tents up, as well as do a good many other things,” said Hugh. “I expect to see the school principal, and try to have a couple of us excused each morning, so that there will be some one at the headquarters up to noon. In fact, I mean to lay out a regular schedule, and let each scout know just what special duty he is to undertake.”

“This is one of the finest things that ever came our way, I think,” remarked Don Miller. “Let’s hope that after the Fair is over the folks who have been thinking poorly of us scouts will have a different opinion.”

“It’s to be hoped that no one who wears the khaki will do the first thing calculated to bring it into disrepute,” suggested Walter Osborne; and some of them saw him cast a quick and perhaps anxious glance toward the spot where the leader of the latest patrol to be organized, the Owl, was sitting.

It was in fact not so very long ago when Lige Corbley had been something of a thorn in the side of Hugh Hardin and the scouts. He had scoffed at their

aspirations, made sport of their helpfulness to others, and seldom missed an opportunity to annoy them. How it came about that Big Lige saw the error of his ways, and made such a complete change in his habits that he actually joined the troop has been entertainingly told in a preceding volume, so it need not be recounted here.

Lige knew that several of the boys, including Walter, were not quite as sure of his loyalty to the laws he had promised to obey, as Hugh and the rest might be. He also understood that this little shaft of suspicion was meant for him; but Lige simply grinned, and apparently paid no attention to it. As long as Hugh had faith in his reformation he was willing to stand for anything. Deeds, and not promises, were what counted, and he believed he was daily proving that he had cut aloof from the old life forever.

After the subject was threshed out thoroughly, so much had been said that some of the fellows declared they hardly knew whether they were standing on their heads or on their heels.

“But order will come out of chaos after a bit, you know,” said Alec, confidently. “It’s always this way at first. By degrees the wheat gets separated from the chaff, and in the end things look clear.”

“I’m willing to leave it all to Hugh!” declared Ralph Kenyon. “Seems like he always does know just what is best to do. I’ve never known him to get far astray in anything he undertook.”

Ralph had good reason to feel this confidence in the assistant scout master. He could look back to the time when he knew absolutely nothing of the finer motives that influence the true scout; when he delighted in spending his winters in trapping harmless little animals both for the fun it afforded him, and the small amount of money he received for their skins when sold to dealers in furs.

Then Ralph had become acquainted with Hugh, who had managed to convince him that there must be many other ways of earning money without giving pain to little creatures, most of them harmless, and even taking their lives away in the bargain. After his eyes had been opened, Ralph Kenyon had spent more time hunting wild ginseng roots, and found that it profited him three times as much as his former cruel occupation.

“We’ll meet here again on Monday night,” said Hugh just then, as they prepared

to leave the room. “By that time I’ll have it all figured out, and each one will receive his orders in black and white. Mayor Strunk himself came to see me, for you know he is the head of the Fair management. He said he expected great things of the scouts, because they had made such great use of their opportunities in the past.”

“Mr. Marsh is one of the managers, too, you remember, fellows,” said Blake Merton. “His wife is president of the Town Improvement Association. She hasn’t forgotten what we did that time to make Oakvale a better place to live in. These things all count. What our boys do is sure to come back to them, just as chickens come home to roost.”

“That’s right, and I know it every day,” called out Lige Corbley. “The hardest thing any fellow ever tries to do is to live down a reputation. Lots of people think they can see the horns sticking out right along. They keep saying it’s only a little veneer or polish, and will rub off. Some of ’em even try to help rub it off; but thank goodness there are others who stand by a fellow, and keep him from going back on the rocks.”

That was the most Lige had ever said before the boys. Walter Osborne turned red in the face with confusion. He felt heartily ashamed of the sly little dig he had given Lige earlier in the evening. Being a frank, candid boy, Walter did not hesitate when he saw his duty clear before him, for he immediately walked straight up to Lige and thrust out his hand, and said:

“I’m sorry if I’ve said anything to hurt your feelings, Lige, and I don’t care who hears me tell it. Honestly, I’m surprised that you’ve done as well as you have with such a handicap on your shoulders. I couldn’t do half as good myself; and from this time on you’ll never hear a whisper from me. I’m proud to shake hands with you and call you my friend.”

And when the scouts separated it was in a far more brotherly frame of mind because of this manly action on the part of Walter Osborne.

CHAPTER III.

ON DUTY AT THE FAIR.

“Everything seems to be in good working order now, Hugh. Even our emergency doctor, Arthur, goes into the hospital tent every ten minutes to mosey around; and I kind of suspect he’s almost wishing that some sort of case would crop up just to let him show his hand at first aid.”

It was Billy Worth doing this talking.

The days had crept by, and now the Fair was a thing of the present. It had really opened with the usual ceremonies that noon, and a throng of people kept pushing in through the several gates, many of them coming from a distance.

The scouts had been energetically at work on the preceding afternoon and evening, some of them getting up at dawn on Wednesday morning in order to complete their arrangements as far as possible.

Two khaki-colored tents, supposed to be waterproof in case of a drenching rain, had been erected on the site given over to their camp use. In one of these the boys had arranged a couple of blanket beds, such as they were in the habit of using when camping out in the woods. These were complete, even to fragrant hemlock browse under each blanket to take the place of the comfortable mattresses at home.

In fact, it was as decent a camp as the ingenuity of the scouts could devise; a number of the fellows gave it some finishing touches that added much to its appearance. They knew that thousands of visitors would manifest a great deal of curiosity in their little model camp. Many of them had no idea how boys lived when on an outing and it was to disarm criticism that all this trouble was taken.

The second tent was to be used as a temporary hospital in case of accidents

during the progress of the Exhibition. There had never been a season that someone did not get injured; and in a crush women had often been known to faint.

A number of the scouts hovered about the camp, anxious to show the comfortable arrangements for sleeping and cooking to their folks, and strangers as well, for they felt a commendable pride in what they had accomplished.

Others were abroad doing some of the many things that had been handed over into their charge. A couple waited at the railroad station for the next incoming train, so as to meet strangers, and either direct them to some place where they could put up while staying in town, or escort them straight to the gates of the County Fair.

Still another lot of the scouts put in their time roaming about the grounds, not only taking in the sights with which they soon became familiar, but also being constantly on the watch for chances to make themselves useful.

This they could do in a thousand ways, if they felt so disposed. Children that had strayed away from their elders in the crowd; tired mothers who did not know where to warm the baby's milk, and were grateful for a little aid; bewildered country people who sought information concerning the best way to leave their rigs so that they would be perfectly safe while they did the sights—yes, there was really no limit to the ways a wide-awake scout, anxious to do his full duty, could extend that helping hand—a part of his profession.

Hugh was feeling pretty well satisfied with the way things had started out. He knew there might be a few little matters needing alteration, but as a whole the camp was in apple-pie order. They need not feel ashamed to have it examined by any fair-minded critic.

A number of gentlemen had already manifested a decided interest. They showered compliments on the tidy manner in which the boys had arranged things.

“I never saw a camp so well ordered,” one man had remarked, “and all my life I've been going into the woods every summer and fall, fishing and shooting. After this I must take my guide to task and have things changed. If boys can show such smartness, it's a burning shame that a man is content to keep camp, with his duffle littered about so that nothing is in place.”

Those sort of things made Hugh feel as though it paid every time to be thorough in all he did, without appearing to be what boys call a “crank.” One can keep his possessions in decent order without making it such a hobby that he becomes a bore to all his comrades.

The assistant scout master laughed when Billy Worth made that remark about the anxiety of Arthur Cameron to have his first patient.

“Oh! you’re stretching things again, Billy, I’m afraid,” he said, shaking his finger at the other. “Arthur isn’t so anxious as all that to see anyone suffering. He only wants to know that everything is all right; just as your mother would go over the house again and again when expecting company. While we’re ready to take care of any emergency case that comes along, I’m sure all of us would be just as well satisfied if there didn’t happen a solitary accident while the Fair lasted.”

“That never occurred yet, as far as I know,” declared Billy; “and there have been some years when as many as a dozen people got hurt. One man last season had a nasty fall with a race horse on top of him, and they took him to the hospital with both legs broken. I could string off half a dozen cases that I plainly remember.”

The coming of a party of visitors, curious to see what the scouts were doing at the two tents, broke up the conversation. For quite some time all of them were busily engaged showing them facts connected with camp life; explaining how they made an excellent cooking fire by using stones for a foundation; proving that the ancient hunter’s way of baking a fowl by shutting it up over night in a hole in the ground previously made very hot was the original “fireless cooker,” and many other interesting things.

All the time each scout was doing everything he could to prove what a great benefit the organization to which he belonged had turned out to be for the boys of America. They made many converts among the men, and also a few among the women, who confessed that up to this time they had been laboring under a false conception as to what the scout movement stood for.

“I can plainly see,” said Arthur to the scout master, after some of these greatly interested people had passed on, shaking hands heartily with the boys as they thanked them for their courtesy, “that there’ll be another patrol of the Oakvale Troop between now and Christmas.”

“It begins to look as if we would set a few hundred people right about the meaning of scoutcraft and ambitions,” admitted Hugh; “and for that, if nothing more, I think this Fair camp is going to be one of the best advertisements we could ever have run across.”

“But while they seem to understand all about the other things we’ve shown them,” Arthur said, looking rather amused, “I can see that they take little stock in the usefulness of scouts in case of accidents. They always look at each other when I’m modestly telling what we hope to do for anyone that needs help, and the way they nod shows that they accept it with a grain of salt.”

“Yes,” said Hugh, also smiling, as if to show that it did not worry him, “I noticed the same. Now, I might have told those unbelievers a few things we’ve done, particularly about that field hospital last summer, and when we helped the Red Cross surgeon and nurses among the injured strikers; but I held my tongue. It would seem too much like blowing our own horn to please me.”

“One thing sure,” interrupted Ned Twyford, who had come up in time to hear the burden of their little conversation. “If they run across any of the Oakvale folks, and get to sneering at the idea of boys doing temporary surgical work, they’re going to hear a few plain facts that will make them sit up and take notice, believe me.”

Another batch of visitors, on their way to see the prize cattle of other fairs that were on exhibition in the sheds not far away, stopped to take a look around. Somehow the sight of those tents seemed to appeal to nearly every man; and he wanted to pick up a few pointers, if his knowledge concerning scout doings was hazy.

Now and then they found parties who believed with all their heart and soul in the movement, because they had seen the wonderful change it made in certain boys—possibly of their own family circle. It was certainly a great pleasure for Hugh and his comrades to chat with these friends, and give them further information in connection with a few things they had enjoyed or endured in the past.

The afternoon was almost half over, and at three o’clock the racing would begin; after which the most exciting event of the day, the aëroplane exhibition, was to be witnessed.

Hugh and Arthur stood by the camp, as their duties lay in that quarter. Others of

the boys came and went as the whim seized them, or they thought of some way in which they could make themselves particularly useful.

Several crying children had already been restored to their almost distracted parents or guardians, since there was a squad of scouts detailed for this purpose. Two unruly horses had been taken in hand before they got fairly started at running away, when the passing band suddenly began to play some lively air. Strangers without number had been supplied with information, or taken from one part of the grounds to another. It would really be difficult to enumerate one-quarter of the methods by which the scouts filled in their time. They were almost constantly on the move, flitting here and there, stopping to answer questions, and being looked upon as real necessities, so that the sight of a khaki uniform was presently hailed as a sure means for dissipating doubt and perplexity.

About this time Billy Worth made his appearance again at headquarters, for he had been scurrying around taking a look at the various attractions, from the building devoted to women's home work, to the fat hogs and the fancy fowls.

Possibly Billy had also strayed into the amusement zone, where there were a few concessions allowed to showmen, with various tents in which freaks held forth; for Billy had a weakness in the way of such things. The smart patter of fakirs who had Brazilian diamonds or patent kindling wood for sale interested him, and whenever one of this type of gentry came to town on a Saturday night, to hold forth on some street corner under a blazing gasoline torch, Billy Worth could be counted on to make one of the spellbound audience.

Billy always explained that he was "taking stock of human nature," and that those glib-tongued spell-binders were worth studying.

He now came up to Hugh with a decided frown visible on his round face. It was an unusual thing for good-natured Billy to appear discontented, or even serious for that matter; so that Hugh immediately asked:

"What ails you, Billy? Something gone wrong, or are you bothering because supper time is so far off?"

"Oh, gee! it isn't anything that concerns me, Hugh," the other replied.

"Then has anything happened to one of our crowd?" continued the scout master, a little vein of anxiety in his tone.

“Hugh, I’m only bothered about a boy I happened to run across,” explained Billy, evidently determined to make a clean breast of it, and take Hugh into his confidence.

“What sort of boy do you mean, and what has he been doing?”

“Why, you see he seems to be connected with one of those fakirs they’ve allowed to sell their wares in the grounds. This chap is a slick-looking article with the blackest eyes you ever saw, and such a queer light in them, too. Every time I felt them fixed on me it gave me the most awful feeling I ever knew. He saw me talking with Cale and must have guessed that he was starting to tell me how he wanted to break away from the fakir, but just couldn’t do it nohow. All at once Cale broke off in what he was saying, his voice drawled as if he was going to sleep, and would you believe it, he just turned his back on me and walked straight up to that fellow, who spoke to him fiercely in a low tone.”

“That sounds interesting, anyway, Billy,” remarked Hugh.

“I tell you,” asserted Billy, with sudden vigor in his voice, “that sneaky fakir has got some unnatural influence over that boy, so as to make him do whatever he wants. I don’t know much about it, but Hugh I honestly believe he’s hypnotized Cale!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAKIR AND HIS DUPE.

Hugh Hardin elevated his eyebrows at hearing Billy say this.

“I don’t take very much stock in anything of that sort, Billy,” he went on to remark, “though of course I know that one strong mind can gain more or less control over a weaker one, so as to make the other obey his will. But hypnotism is going further than that.”

“Well,” returned Billy, “you just wander around that way with me as if we wanted to look the freaks over, or listen to the patter of the fakirs who’re selling patent medicine and such things to the crowd, as well as telling them funny stories to keep them in good humor.”

“I’ll take you up on that in a minute,” said the scout master, “when Alec Sands comes along, for I see him heading this way right now. I can leave the camp in his charge, you know, while we walk around for a change.”

“But Hugh, be careful not to stare at that man too hard,” urged Billy. “Gee! but he has got the most piercing black eyes you ever saw in your life. They seem to go right through you, and cause a shiver as if somebody had doused a bucket of ice-water all over you.”

Hugh laughed at the vivid description given, and then said:

“If there is such a thing as being hypnotized, Billy, you’re in a fair way to find yourself obeying the superior will of that owner of the piercing black eyes, and keeping poor Cale company. How did you happen to run across the boy?”

“Oh! I couldn’t help noticing how he seemed to be under the thumb of that man,” Billy explained. “You see, he’s useful to the fakir as a stool pigeon. When sales get slack it’s the business of the boy to hold up a dollar bill, and ask for a

bottle of the wonderful remedy, and say it cured his grandmother of every ailment under the sun. Then he goes away, and gets rid of the bottle, to bob up again later on, watching for his cue to break in again with a purchase.”

“That’s the game, is it, as old as the hills; and yet I suppose the rubes never catch on to it,” remarked Hugh. “I’m surprised at the management of this Fair allowing such frauds to exhibit here, and sell their stuff.”

“Oh! they’re mad about it already, but you see they went and made contracts so they have to stick it out; but the like will never happen at Oakvale again, I’m telling you.”

“But tell me about the boy Cale,” urged Hugh.

“Why, I guess he was attracted by my khaki suit, for we got to chatting over on one side of the moving crowd. He told me his name was Cale, but nothing more than that. He acted so queer that I began to take notice, because, you see, I like to study human nature.”

“Yes, we all know that, Billy; but go on, please.”

“He would look in the direction of that man on the soap box every minute or so while I was explaining some of the things scouts enjoy, for he had asked me to tell him about that. Every time he would give a start, and draw a long breath. I saw something ailed him, and after a while I asked him plainly what made him go around to fairs and harvest homes with a fakir like that? He turned as white as anything, and looked at me as if it was on the tip of his tongue to say that he’d gone and hitched up with the man, and couldn’t break away. Then it happened, Hugh.”

“You mean he felt the influence of those black eyes, and suddenly left you without an explanation?” demanded the scout master.

“All he muttered as he moved away was something that sounded to me like this: ‘Wisht I could tell you, but I just *can’t*; he won’t let me; I have to do what he wants me to. If you could only break——’ and that was all I caught, for he had gone.”

Hugh rubbed his chin reflectively.

“There may be more about this than appears on the surface,” he told Billy, much to the gratification of that worthy. “Perhaps it may pay us to take an interest in this Cale. There are lots of ways in which other fellows can be helped, and if he’s held tight in the clutches of a bad man, the sooner we get some people interested in him the better.”

“Bully for you, Hugh; I’m tickled to have you say that. But here’s Alec, so now suppose you browse around a little with me while he stands guard at the camp.”

The leader of the Otters was only too pleased to be given this temporary responsibility, and so the others sauntered off.

They did not head directly toward the amusement zone, for that might excite the suspicion of the fakir, did he happen to see them making for his stand. By degrees, however, the two scouts approached the spot, apparently interested in the pratter of the spell-binders in front of the several tents containing freaks and curiosities.

Although the races were going on, and crowds had gathered to witness the horses run, there was so large a throng present at the opening of the Fair that clusters of people were to be met at every turn. Such an outpouring had never before been known on the first day, thanks to the sagacious advertising of the affair.

“Now you can see the fakir, Hugh, if you just look over to the left,” remarked Billy, after a bit.

At the time they were apparently interested in another fraud who was amusing his audience with side-splitting stories, and reaping a harvest of quarters in return for a fountain pen that may have been worth as much as a dime.

Billy himself kept from facing that way, and he also warned the other not to appear to look too hard.

“See him, don’t you, Hugh?” he asked. “What do you think of the animal?”

“Oh! he’s a slick article, I’ve no doubt, with a glib tongue, and a way of convincing people they must have the stuff he has to dispose of. I can hear him talking, and as you say he’s no ordinary fakir. At this distance I don’t feel any effect of those magnetic black eyes you talked so much about. Where’s the

boy?”

“Look a little further to the right and you’ll see Cale,” pursued Billy, who had himself discovered these things with a hasty survey. “He’s leaning against that post, and kicking his toe into the earth while waiting for his cue to push in and buy another bottle of the magic compound that cures all ills.”

“Yes, I see him now, and he certainly does look pretty dejected,” said Hugh. “There’s a sort of slinking air about him too, as if he might be ashamed of what he’s compelled to do, but can’t help himself.”

“That’s what I was saying, Hugh,” declared Billy, eagerly. “He’s sort of weak by nature, and has made some terrible mistake in the past that cuts him to the heart. He might be all right if only we could get him away from that slick fakir who’s using him as his tool.”

“Well, we’ll think it over, Billy,” said the scout master.

“You mean nothing could be done right away, Hugh?”

“There’s no need to hurry,” he was told. “They mean to stay here until the Fair closes Saturday night, because their best harvest will come later on, when people from further out in the country get here. By to-morrow we may have settled on some sort of plan how to offer the poor fellow a helping hand.”

Billy, who always wanted to rush things, gave a big sigh.

“Of course, it’s all right if you say so, Hugh,” he remarked, resignedly, “and I’m willing to wait until to-morrow, or even Friday, to act; but I hope it isn’t put off any longer than that, for something might happen to make him clear out. One of the poor deluded sillies who bought a bottle of medicine might take too much and die; and then the authorities would arrest him for it.”

At the solicitation of Billy, the scout master walked off by himself, presently joining the group around the glib-tongued bogus “doctor,” and listening to what he was saying. He even saw the stool pigeon push through the gathering to demand a bottle of the wonderful cure-all that had so lengthened the days of his respected grandfather that they were unwilling to keep house without its magical presence.

Hugh studied the boy when he had the chance. He realized that Billy had about hit the mark when he described him as one who appeared to have a rather weak nature, easily controlled by a stronger will. Cale's manner was anything but pleasing; still Hugh did not believe the boy was really vicious or depraved.

"Yes, he ought to be helped to break his associations with that clever scamp," was what the scout master was deciding in his mind as he watched the ancient game of confidence being played upon the curious throng, with a subsequent purchase by several who had been hesitating, and only waiting for someone else to break the ice, so they could hand up their dollar without being too prominent.

He even managed to follow the boy as he hurried off, and saw how he circled around, dodging through the crowds and finally bringing up at a tent into which he ducked. When he came out immediately afterwards he no longer carried the paper wrapped bottle of medicine. Hugh did not need to see the sign "Old Doctor Merritt" fastened to the dingy canvas to understand that this was the temporary sleeping quarters of the fakir, and also of his helper, who deposited all his pretended purchases back in stock.

Hugh went back to the scouts' camp, thinking what a shame it was that, for the sake of the small amount of money paid over by these mountebanks and fakirs, the management of the County Fair had sold them the privilege of fleecing the confiding visitors who came from distances, under the belief that Oakvale would protect her guests against all such cheating games as these.

"It'll never happen again, if the scouts can put our people wise to such a debasing side show sort of business," Hugh told the others, when they were talking things over at the camp during a temporary lull in the rush of visitors.

"We've been able to do a few things that count in the long run," said Alec. "If future fairs can be conducted without so much of this rowdy sort of selling concessions to fake shows and fakirs with claptrap humbugs to stick the gullible public with, it would be a feather in our caps, I'm telling you, boys."

Here then was one thing they could concentrate their efforts on that gave promise of paying for the investment of capital and labor. The idea pleased the boys the more it was discussed; and Hugh asked those who were present to push it wherever they had a chance. This was to be in their homes or on the street, until the management of the Fair must feel it their duty to make a statement to

the effect that this was the very last occasion when any of these objectionable elements would be admitted to the grounds, or even allowed outside.

Hugh, Arthur and Lige Corbley chanced to be standing there in front of the camp talking with another batch of curious visitors, who wanted to be shown everything connected with scout life under canvas, when there was a sudden loud outcry.

“A runaway!” shouted Lige, as he pushed his way out of the circle of people, for he was a fellow quick to act.

They were just in time to see a vehicle coming dashing along, drawn by a very much excited pair of horses that must have taken fright at some unusually noisy motorcar. Even as the boys looked one of the two men in the rig sprang out, taking his chances. The other was vainly endeavoring to saw the two frantic animals into subjection by pulling at the lines.

He might have succeeded in this, but unfortunately one of the reins broke. Lige was on hand, however, and, clutching hold of the bits close to the mouth of the near horse, he managed to detain the struggling pair until others could come to his assistance.

It was quite exciting while it lasted, and Hugh felt glad that Big Lige had been the one to stop the runaway. The latter shrugged his shoulders when Hugh tried to compliment him, and said it “didn’t amount to a row of beans, in fact was almost too easy!”

“There’s a crowd coming this way, and as sure as you live they’re carrying the man who made that fool jump out of the vehicle!” exclaimed Dale Evans, who had arrived at the camp just in time to see this thrilling runaway.

“Unless I’m mistaken, Arthur,” said Hugh, turning on the other with a smile, “there comes your first patient!”

CHAPTER V.

A CREDIT TO THE UNIFORM.

“Looks as if he might be hurt pretty bad, too,” said Billy Worth, as the crowd pressed forward, and approached the twin tents of the scouts.

“First thing we have to do is to keep them back as well as we can,” declared Hugh. “Whip that rope around the stakes, boys, and then stand guard over the opening you leave.”

The scout master had prepared for just such an emergency as this. He knew that in case of a serious accident, if the patient were brought to the camp, a morbid curiosity to see what was going on was apt to bring an enormous mob surging around the tents.

That is one of the most serious difficulties to be encountered whenever there happens to be an accident in the public streets of a city; and so fiercely do men, women and boys struggle to see what is going on that they often have to be entreated to fall back in order that the patient may get air.

“Bring him right in this tent,” said Hugh to the men who were carrying the man, who was groaning with pain; and then turning to the pressing crowd the scout master continued: “Please don’t push so hard. The tent is open, and some of you can see what is going on. Keep back, and give us a chance to do something.”

That appeal awoke the spirit of fair play. Immediately one man called out:

“Yes, give the boys a chance to show what they can do! Everybody keep back, and stop that rough house business. Here, help me hold ’em, Crowther; give the scouts a show for their money. Get back, do you hear; what d’ye want to push like that for?”

He used energetic measures for enforcing his demands; and as he happened to be

a big brawny man those who had been squeezing forward so as to gain a view of the proceedings ceased their efforts.

Hugh was satisfied. He saw they had gained friends among the watchers, and that the danger of the tent being almost torn from its moorings by the press of the rude crowd was a thing of the past.

Accordingly he turned and joined Arthur, who was already bending over the groaning man with professional eagerness.

“How bad is it, do you think, Arthur?” asked Hugh.

“I’m not sure, but he seems to have a broken arm, and one of his ankles has been sprained, for it’s swelling fast,” replied Arthur, who had apparently made a surprisingly quick examination.

“A pretty bad combination,” remarked Hugh. “Here, Dale, you and Billy get that shoe off in a hurry, but don’t be any rougher than you can help.”

In the meantime Hugh started to assist Arthur. The man had been laid on the cot with which the hospital tent was supplied. They lifted his head and shoulders a little.

“Try and stand it the best you can, sir,” said Hugh, endeavoring to give the suffering man confidence. “We want to draw your coat off, and then cut the sleeve of your shirt so we can get at the injured arm.”

Now had it been a bearded doctor who said this the man might have bolstered up his courage, and stopped giving utterance to his anguish; but when he saw that the speaker was only a boy he shut his eyes and groaned again.

The coat came off, and then Arthur deftly cut the sleeve of the man’s shirt. He had no sooner rolled this up out of the way before they saw that the fracture was a pretty serious one, coming above the wrist, and apparently being of a compound nature.

Arthur did not hesitate. He seemed to have the instincts of a true surgeon in his nature, for grasping the injured arm he made a few deft movements with his strong nimble fingers, and then taking the splints which Hugh had picked up from the little chest in which they kept their medical supplies he began binding

these to the arm with swift, certain strokes.

Those in the crowd who were able to watch the operation were astonished by the business-like way in which Arthur and Hugh went about it all.

Meanwhile the other boys had removed shoe and sock and rolled up the leg of the man's trousers. His ankle was swollen, and beginning to turn a dark blue.

"Get the tin basin and pour cold water over the ankle to keep the swelling down all you can, Dale," said the scout master, giving one glance that way.

Dale was already doing this, for he knew that with a sprain the application of ice or cold water is the first remedy to be considered. At the best such an injury is a serious thing, and often takes months to fully heal. Many persons have declared they would prefer to have a clean break of a bone than a bad sprain.

"D'ye mean to tell me them boys know anything about fixin' up a broken bone?" one man was heard to say, with an expression of scorn in his voice. "Why, I'd think it was a man's work, an' a skillful surgeon's at that, to set a bone. In my mind it's an outrage to let boys meddle with serious things like that."

"Hold on, neighbor," said the big man who had stood there as a bulwark, keeping the jostling, thoughtless, curious crowd back by main force, "where have you been the last year or so? I reckon all the Rip Van Winkles ain't done away with yet. Wake up, and get 'quainted with what's goin' on these days. Kids ain't just the same as when you and me was young; they're shamin' a whole lot of us old codgers by the way they do a heap of things."

"That's all right," asserted the other, doggedly, "but when it comes to meddlin' with broken bones I say it's a surgeon's job, and no boy should be allowed to put his finger in the pie. Why, like as not he'll make that arm crooked for life. What can these here scouts know about surgery, tell me?"

"A whole lot, as you'll learn if you take the scales off your eyes and look into what they've already done. These very scouts here have saved some of their comrades from drowning. They likewise took care of those strikers that were shot down last summer when they had that fight with the guards over at the cement works; yes, and the Red Cross surgeon wrote our paper here that they did their work like veterans. If I ever have the bad luck to get thrown out of a buggy and have *my* leg broke I'll be tickled to death if some of these scouts happen

along and take hold of *me*.”

These words were greeted with a cheer by the crowd, for many local people were now present, and surely they ought to know what Hugh and his comrades of Oakvale Troop were capable of accomplishing.

The skeptic may not have been wholly convinced that the boys were capable of doing the things that as a rule needed the skilled hand of a surgeon; but at least he had the good sense to keep still. That vociferous cheer may have told him that those around had faith in the scouts.

He continued to watch every move that was made, and no doubt the confident manner in which all the boys went about their several tasks began to have its effect on his disbelief. They certainly were showing all the signs of knowing what they were about, and that stood for a good deal.

The man had stopped groaning now. He even brightened up, for after the bones had been brought together in their proper places, the pain was not quite so intense. Then again the way in which Arthur and Hugh were binding up his arm, after fixing the splints in place, may have had something to do with the return of his grit.

“What’s the extent of the damage, boys?” he asked, weakly.

“A broken arm, and a sprained ankle, sir,” said Hugh, cheerily; “but you’re in great luck not to have a broken neck in the bargain. We’ll have you fixed up so you can be moved. I guess you don’t live in Oakvale, sir, for you’re a stranger to me?”

“I live some ten miles off toward Somerville; but after that accident I’d hate to ride behind horses again while crippled like this,” said the man.

“No need, sir,” Hugh told him. “If you say the word we’ll send for the ambulance and you can go to the hospital; or if you prefer we can get a car to take you home.”

“I guess I’d better go to the hospital,” the wounded man said. “My wife, she died last spring, and I’ve only got an old man and his wife working on the farm.”

“All right,” returned the scout master. “Dale, will you call up the hospital and

tell them to come and get a patient with a broken arm and a sprained ankle? Billy, wrap some soft linen around that sprain now, and soak it with the liniment. Then get another bandage around it, and we'll loan him a cane. It so happens that he can use the arm he needs to support him when he limps."

Dale hurried away, and quickly got the town hospital on the wire. When he came back presently he nodded to Hugh. "They're on the way by now, I reckon," he announced.

The man had put his uninjured arm through a sleeve of his coat, and the garment was then fastened so that it might not fall off.

"Well, I want to say that you boys have done a right good job tinkering with me," he said, as they helped him sit up on the cot, and Dale procured the heavy cane that was lying handy. "After this I'm going to take more interest in the scout doings than I've done in the past. If being a scout can make boys think, and act like this, there must be a heap of good about the business."

"You can just depend on it there is, Mr. Benson," said the big guard, who seemed to know the injured man. "I've looked into the game, and let me tell you it's going to pay a thousand per cent. for every effort put into it by the long-headed gentlemen who have the movement in charge. Ten and twenty years from now there's going to be a heap better class of men around than you meet to-day; and all on account of these scouts."

A few minutes later and there was heard the sound of a gong, and up came the Red Cross ambulance. The injured man was easily helped into the vehicle, while Arthur and Hugh explained to the young surgeon just what steps they had taken to relieve suffering, and render first aid to the injured.

"You couldn't have done better," said the medical man, patting Arthur on the shoulder, for he knew both lads well, and also understood the design of one of them to some day become a surgeon. "I'll let you know later what I think of the way you fixed up his arm."

The ambulance went off presently, with the man waving his one well arm back at the crowd, and particularly toward the boys who had performed their part so well in the tragic happening of the afternoon.

Slowly the crowd dispersed, and the scouts could find time to put things to rights

again. Arthur was looking as pleased as though he were “a child with a new toy,” Billy remarked to Hugh, under his breath.

The big man lingered. He was plainly greatly interested in the boys, and asked a great many questions.

“That man you helped,” he told Hugh, “was a Silas Benson, who lives over toward Somerville. He’s one of the richest men in those parts, though folks call him close. But since his wife died I reckon there’s a change coming over Silas; and somehow I kind of think what’s happened to him to-day may set him to figuring that he might as well get busy living for somebody besides himself. You’re going to hear from him again, boy, mark my words.”

And they did, later on, when the rich farmer had recovered from his injuries. He wanted them to accept a reward, but was shown that scouts are not allowed to receive pay for their services; and in the end Mr. Benson was easily influenced to do something for the needs of the orphan asylum of Oakvale, which was overcrowded, and required a new wing built.

Some time after the excitement had subsided Walter Osborne, who had been busy in another part of the Fair grounds, came to the camp, and Hugh could see by the look on his face he had something on his mind that was giving him more or less concern.

CHAPTER VI.

“STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT!”

“It’s the queerest thing how it gives me the slip!” Walter was muttering when he came up to where the scout master was standing, watching the crowd drift past, and often waving his hand at some boy, or group of high school girls.

“What ails you, Walter; have you lost anything?” asked Hugh, laying a hand on the arm of the leader of the Hawk Patrol, of whom he was very fond.

“I must be getting along in my dotage, Hugh, when I can’t remember where I met a fellow, even when his face seems so familiar to me,” the other went on to say, with a frown on his usually placid brow.

“Oh, that isn’t such a queer thing,” Hugh assured him. “I’ve had it happen to me more than once. It always bothers me, and I get no peace till I’ve figured it out. I’ve even lain awake a night going over the alphabet from A to Z, and then failing to get it. In the morning the name would come to my mind just as easy as falling off a log.”

“Well, that may be the way with me,” said Walter. “I stood and watched that boy move around, and half a dozen times it seemed as though it must be on the tip of my tongue to say his name, yet I slipped connections. A little thing like that makes me mad. I tell you I’ll find out just who he is, if in the end I have to go up and ask him.”

“Perhaps, if you pointed him out to me, I might help you,” suggested Hugh, knowing how set in his way Walter could be.

“I could do that all right, Hugh,” replied the other scout. “Come to think of it he’s acting as if he mightn’t be engaged in the nicest kind of business going.”

“How about that?” demanded Hugh.

“Why,” came the reply, “from what I saw it struck me he must be connected with one of those fakirs who are trying to skin the simple country people of their dollars.”

Hugh arched his eyebrows, remembering what Billy had told him.

“Do you remember whether the man he was working with was a fake doctor who has a medicine he calls the Wonderful New Life Remedy at a dollar a bottle, worth ten to any one? Is he a man with a black pointed beard, and eyes that glitter like you’ve seen a badger’s or a snake’s do?”

Walter uttered an exclamation of wonderment.

“Why, I declare, Hugh, you’ve hit the right fakir to a dot,” he told the scout master. “Perhaps you’ve even noticed that boy?”

“Yes, I have,” Hugh remarked. “Billy called my attention to him.”

“Say, did Billy seem to think he’d met him somewhere, too?”

“No, but he did say he believed the boy was under some sort of queer spell, for he acted as if he’d like to break away from that fake doctor, but didn’t dare try it.”

“You don’t say, Hugh?” remarked Walter. “I didn’t seem to notice anything like that. But I’d give a heap just to remember where it was I ever met that boy before. I can’t seem to place him.”

“Billy said he called himself Cale,” observed Hugh; but Walter, after thinking it over for a brief period of time, shook his head in the negative.

“That doesn’t seem to help me any, Hugh,” he admitted.

“You don’t ever remember of knowing any one named Cale or Caleb, then?”

“Why, there was a Cale Warner I used to go with long ago, but then he had red hair and blue eyes, while this boy is as dark as a gypsy. Don’t seem able to scare up another Cale. Perhaps I never knew his name at all. Perhaps I only happened to meet him somewhere. But where was it, that’s the question?”

“I wish I could help you, Walter, because I know how it galls you to keep reaching out and almost getting it, and then feeling that you’re left. But it’ll come to you all of a sudden, see if it doesn’t. You’ll find yourself saying his name, or remembering where you met him.”

“I was wondering if it could have been that time we earned these bronze medals we’re wearing right now?” suggested Walter.

“You mean when we had the chance to help the wounded strikers,” said Hugh. “Well, it may have been, but I’m sure I never set eyes on that boy before to-day.”

“Do you know what this game makes me think of, Hugh?”

“Prisoners’ base, with the fellow you thought to grab slipping right out of your hands?” suggested the other.

“I was thinking of something else,” resumed Walter; “you know when you’re in the marsh at a certain time of year, and the night’s dark, often you’ll discover a queer light that dances just ahead of you. When you stretch out your hand and think to take hold, it disappears, only to bob up again somewhere else.”

“Yes, I know what you mean, Walter,” admitted Hugh. “They call it a Will-o’-the-wisp, or a jack-o’-lantern, and tell us it’s caused by some kind of phosphoric condition of the atmosphere. Standing on the deck of a moving steamboat and looking down into the water I’ve seen streaks like that shoot away as fish fled from the boat.”

“Well, that’s just the way this name keeps on eluding me,” Walter confessed.

Something came up then to call for Hugh’s attention, and the subject was dropped; but when Walter walked away later on, heading once more toward the amusement reservation, where the fakirs also held forth, his face looked unusually serious, as though he could not get that puzzle out of his mind.

The boys were called on to attend several more cases of necessity during the balance of that first afternoon. Fortunately none of these proved to be of a serious nature, however.

One elderly woman fainted, and was speedily brought to her senses with the help of a sprinkling of cold water, and some ammonia held under her nostrils. A boy

had his finger cut by handling something he had no business to touch, and they brought him, crying, to the emergency tent, where Arthur soon stopped the bleeding, and did the finger up in such a neat way that even the kid was soon smiling through his tears.

The aëroplane exhibition had passed off successfully, and as usual it gave considerable satisfaction, because everybody was showing great interest in the modern methods of harnessing the air currents to the use of mankind.

It was now getting on toward closing time, which had been placed at sharp six o'clock every evening. County fairs as a rule do not pretend to keep open nights, as they are mostly outdoor shows, and the means for illuminating the exhibits would be found sadly lacking.

By degrees the scouts were gathering in their camps, and making preparations looking to going home to a good hot supper. Most of the boys were furiously hungry, for it had been a long afternoon, and they had certainly covered a good deal of territory in carrying out their plan of campaign.

“Of course we meet here again to-morrow afternoon, as soon as we can get a bite of lunch at home?” remarked Spike Welling, brushing his leggings free from dust, for Spike had been one of the most industrious guides on the grounds ever since arriving.

“That’s understood without any further orders,” Hugh told him. “The programme we laid out for to-day will carry over to-morrow as well. I want to say to you now that every fellow has done himself and the troop proud by his work to-day. I’m sure the people of Oakvale appreciate what we’ve tried to do for the success of the County Fair.”

“Here comes President Truesdale, Hugh,” interrupted Alec Sands.

“And I bet you he’s heading this way to give us the glad hand, too,” added Billy, immediately beginning to swell out his ample chest as though in anticipation of the bouquets that would soon be passing around.

The head man of the Association, as he drew near, was pleased to see the scouts line up like magic, and give him the proper salute. Evidently he had been hearing pretty favorable reports of their doings, because there was a smile on his face as he surveyed that double khaki-clad line of bright eager faces.

“Thank you, boys,” the President said, warmly, as he acknowledged this salute in his honor by a wave of his hand. “I couldn’t leave the grounds this evening until I had come over here to your camp to tell you how well satisfied we all are with the great help you have given the management in carrying out their arduous duties. I’ve heard great reports of you in a dozen different ways. If this Fair is a success beyond any previous exhibition, part of the credit will justly fall to the Oakvale Troop of Boy Scouts.”

“Hurrah!” cried Billy Worth, and three lusty cheers were given with a will.

Hugh never knew what impelled him to say what he did. Perhaps the matter was on his mind, and somehow he just felt that the opportunity was too good to be entirely lost. He was afterward rather surprised at his own audacity; but then the President happened to be a congenial gentleman who felt warmly toward the wearers of the khaki, so Hugh decided to “strike while the iron is hot.”

“We are very much obliged to you for saying what you have, sir,” Hugh spoke up. “It makes us feel proud to know that what little we’ve done pleases you. If you will excuse me for being so bold, I’d like to say that there’s only one thing wrong with the whole Fair, as we see it.”

“What might that be, my boy?” asked the gentleman, raising his eyebrows as if rather taken aback at hearing Hugh speak so fearlessly.

“It’s about those fakirs, and some of the side-show humbugs, sir,” continued the scout master, while his chums held their breath in mingled admiration. “They are a disgrace to Oakvale. They are here to deceive the public, and take as much money away as they can, using all sorts of deception. We’ve been told that next year it’s going to be different, and we all hope that’s a fact.”

The gentleman stood there and eyed Hugh under his heavy brows. They could not exactly tell whether he might feel angry at being spoken to so boldly, or only amused. Hugh himself was beginning to suspect that he may have done an unwise thing, and offended the President. His fears, however, proved groundless, for presently the other spoke again.

“I agree with every word you have said, Hugh. It was a great mistake to bind ourselves by contract to allow these disgraces this year. All of my colleagues realize it now, and take my word for it, nothing like it will ever happen again. We know it is necessary to have some way of amusing the majority of people

who attend these fairs; but we'll find a way to do that without allowing them to be fleeced by a gang of legalized robbers."

"Hurrah!" called Billy again, just as though he had been made cheer captain for the whole troop. Nearly a score of lusty young voices rang out once, twice, three times in unison.

Some of the retiring people hurrying toward the gates, at hearing the vociferous cheers, glanced that way, and seeing the scouts, smiled; for in nearly every quarter Hugh and his comrades had won golden opinions on account of their universal desire to be of assistance, with their unfailing courtesy toward strangers, as well as to those whom they knew.

So the President of the Association went away with a last happy nod toward the khaki boys. Having laced both tents securely so that their goods might be reasonably safe, Hugh led his troop out of the grounds in regular marching order, with the flag and the bugler in front, and the others following two abreast.

As they were separating, Walter managed to whisper to the scout master:

"I'm going to knock my head to-night and see if I can't just remember where it was I met that boy; tell you how I got on when I see you to-morrow afternoon."

CHAPTER VII. SOWING THE SEED.

The second day of the County Fair promised to show even a greater attendance than the opening one had done. Of course, the really fine weather had considerable to do with the success of the undertaking, for it would be hard to imagine a more complete failure than such an exhibition always proves when an unfortunate rainy spell comes along just after it had started.

Once again did the scouts appear in full numbers, eager to undertake another afternoon's work. At home and abroad, as well as in the school-room, they had been hearing nothing but encouraging words, and were thus primed for excelling their previous record.

Walter Osborne saw the scout master looking at him with a quizzical smile on his face, as soon as he arrived at the camp. He shook his head rather dolefully in the negative.

"That name gets on my nerves, for a fact, Hugh!" the Hawk leader confessed.

"Then, after all, you didn't dream the answer last night, or have it pop into your head the first thing this morning?" asked Hugh.

"Same old story," said Walter. "I'd open my mouth to say where I had met that boy, and then get no further. I mean to keep an eye on him part of the afternoon. Perhaps I may glimpse some little way he has about him that will freshen up this silly old memory of mine. A fine scout I'm turning out to be when I can't remember a little thing like that."

"Oh! don't bother your head too much about it," Hugh advised him; "that is, I hope you won't let it interfere with your duties."

"I can promise you that, Hugh. My folks had word from Uncle Reuben and Aunt

Ruth this morning. They hope to land in Oakvale on that six-twenty train this evening, so I expect to go right down from here and meet them in time for supper.”

“I’m glad they’ll be here for the last two days of the Fair,” remarked Hugh, “for it certainly will be worth seeing.”

He soon had his various detachments at work. Some were sent to the station to meet the next train; others wandered about the grounds, and into the various buildings where all manner of exhibits of great interest to the farmer and the housewife were being admired by thousands of visitors.

“I wonder whether we’ll have any serious cases to-day?” remarked Arthur Cameron, as he joined Hugh, and looking around expectantly as he spoke at the passing throng.

“It’s to be hoped not,” the other replied. “I wouldn’t seem so anxious if I were you, Arthur. If they come we’ll try our best to take care of them; but all the same we shouldn’t allow ourselves to wish for anything like that.”

“Oh! I didn’t mean it that way, Hugh,” exclaimed Arthur, turning red with confusion; “though a fellow begins to have a professional curiosity concerning the character of his next job. That was so easy what we had yesterday, you know.”

“Was it?” remarked Hugh. “Well, all the people who spoke to me about it seemed to think the other way. Several said they admired the nerve you showed; and one old lady even went so far as to tell me—now don’t get proud, Arthur—that you were a born surgeon.”

Arthur drew in a long breath. That praise did him more good than anything he had ever heard; for he meant to be a surgeon; and nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of his following whither inclination and destiny beckoned.

Again there were scores of visitors attracted by the trim camp, and the sight of the manly looking boys in scout uniforms. They stopped to ask questions, and were shown the complete camping arrangements, all of which interested them. Hugh could not but notice that a look of doubt and skepticism crossed many of the faces of these strangers when they heard that the second tent was to be used as an emergency hospital, and that the boys stood ready to perform any needed

surgical operation as covered by the rules of “first aid to the injured.”

The good people could readily understand how boys might camp out, take care of themselves in the woods if lost, and engage in various games connected with life in the open—such as reading signs left by small wild animals, or following the trail of a comrade—but they were unwilling to believe the boys could actually save human life by prompt attendance.

“We ought to have a little pamphlet to hand out to these Doubting Thomases, according to my way of thinking,” said Don Miller, the leader of the Fox Patrol, after a party of rustics had gone on, smiling, and exchanging nods after hearing of that useful tent’s part in the arrangements.

“The chances are,” said Hugh, “that even then they’d think we were blowing our own horns a little. The only thing that convinces some people is a practical demonstration.”

“Oh! well, our folks know we can do what we claim, so what’s the use bothering about what these other people think?” said Buck Winter, who had happened along in time to overhear this little talk.

In the very next lot of visitors Hugh saw a boy who was all eyes and ears for the different devices looking to giving the scouts comfort when in camp. Apparently the lad was wild to join a troop, but his father had a sour look on his face that would seem to indicate he did not approve of such a thing.

“I’d like to sow a few seeds there that may take root and grow,” Hugh told himself, and immediately he took great pains to explain a dozen different ways whereby scouts are bound to become better boys at home on account of the training they receive when in company of their mates.

After he had managed to interest the man he began telling him of a number of instances he could vouch for where backward boys had been aroused from their condition of seeming torpor, and surprised their parents by the new spirit with which they took hold of things.

All the while the boy was tugging at the coat of his father, and every jerk he gave when Hugh made some likely assertion seemed to say:

“There, didn’t I tell you so, dad? What do you think of that? If other fellows can

do it why don't you give me a chance to try and see?"

The man began to ask questions. He also looked at his boy as though debating the matter with himself, for it was hard to change his mind, when he had been running down this Boy Scout movement the way he had. Still, Hugh had appealed to him in a manner that was almost irresistible.

"I've got a good notion to make the venture," he said to Hugh, presently; "his maw's been plaguing me nearly to death to let Johnny jine, but somehow I had an idea it was a fool thing, and he'd only waste his time. You see he's not as bright as he might be; and since you've been telling me about other boys that woke up, it sot me to thinking perhaps Johnny might get some good out of it."

Hugh would never forget the look on the boy's face as he heard his father make this confession. He was so utterly overwhelmed with joy that he hardly seemed to breathe as he looked first at Hugh and then at his father.

"The chances are ten to one," said the scout master, "that you'll never regret it if you decide to let him come in. Do you live anywhere near Oakvale, sir; I don't remember meeting you before?"

"My name is Wheeler, and I've bought the old Lyons farm about three miles out," the other explained. "I've been hearing a whole lot about the scouts, and what big things they've been doing over there at the cement works riot, and so on. Course it seemed impossible to me, but since coming to the Fair I've struck an old friend who said he helped keep back the crowd yesterday when you boys took care of the man that was hurt in that runaway accident."

"Oh! you must mean Mr. Jones," said Hugh, mentioning the name the big man had given him before taking his departure.

"Yes, he's the one. Somehow, after I'd heard him tell a few things I began to feel sort of different toward you scouts. I had to own up to myself that I was prejudiced, and hadn't been fair to you. Now, I come in on Saturday afternoons, and could fetch Johnny along with me, picking him up about ten o'clock when I passed by on the way home."

"Oh! dad!" gasped the delighted Johnny; while Hugh gave him a sunny look and a handshake that meant everything to the boy whose one longing seemed to be to see himself one of the scouts whom he had admired so long from a distance.

Hugh never allowed a chance to slip past when he could say a good word for the advancement of the cause. He knew that thousands of boys would be eager to wear the khaki and start on the upward climb if it were not for the decided opposition they experienced at home. According to Hugh's viewpoint that was the very place where they should be receiving the most encouragement.

If parents, instead of blindly denouncing any movement like this, would only candidly examine it, see what it has done for other boys in their own town, and then decide the question on its merits, thousands of additions would be made to the scout ranks.

As the afternoon wore on there were several cases requiring first aid. They happened to all be of a minor character, though Arthur gave them his best attention, for he believed in doing everything well. One boy was taken with a bad case of cramps, and howled dismally until "Old Doc Cameron," as Billy had nicknamed Arthur, succeeded in relieving the griping pain by the use of some remedy he always carried in the medicine chest. Boys, when out in camp, are apt to be reckless in their manner of eating, and devour green apples or any other fruit calculated to double them up with *cholera morbus*. Then some remedy that contains camphor and pepper is needed to warm the stomach, and counteract the effects of the dangerous food.

Arthur did manage to have one rather difficult operation later on. A man came limping over to the tent, claiming that he had made a bad stroke with an axe he was wielding and managed to cut his foot. On examination the hurt proved to be a serious one; but Arthur washed the foot, cleansed the wound perfectly, so that all danger of blood poisoning was avoided, and after binding it up properly, the man was sent to his home in a car offered by an accommodating visitor (who had been an interested spectator of the whole operation).

He had just gone off when Hugh discovered Billy coming up. It dawned on him that Billy had kept himself aloof from the camp ever since they opened their headquarters that afternoon, though he must have been doing scout work elsewhere, for Billy was not the one to shirk.

Hugh noticed that the stout chum looked excited, and while there was really no reason for connecting this fact with what they had talked about on the preceding afternoon, the scout master found himself remembering the cause of their conversation on that same occasion.

“You’ve been up to something, Billy, if looks count,” Hugh told him as the other came up, panting a little from hurrying.

“Well, I don’t know that you could hardly call it that, Hugh,” said Billy. “I own up I’ve been keeping an eye on that medicine fakir and Cale, because I like to study human nature, you remember, and that pair certainly make a fellow sit up and take notice.”

“Anything new in that quarter?” asked Hugh, carelessly, to draw the other out.

“Just what I hurried here to tell you, Hugh.”

“Oh! then there have been developments?”

“I think the queer influence that slick fakir Old Doctor Merritt has been exercising over that chap Cale must be weakening around now, Hugh. How do I know? Well, I’ll tell you. As I passed close to their medicine tent I heard a loud voice. It was the fake doctor threatening violence to the boy if he didn’t keep on doing his part to victimize the public. Hugh, I believe Cale is trying to break away; and I tell you—it’s about time we stepped in to take a hand in the game.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCOUT IN TROUBLE.

“Don’t get excited about it, Billy,” said Hugh, in his soothing way.

“I’ll try and keep cool, Hugh,” came the reply; “but there’s something about the looks and ways of that fake doctor that makes my blood boil. He couldn’t drag me around like he does that Cale; but, then, everybody isn’t alike.”

“Yes, he’d have a pretty hefty job hauling you around with him,” assented Hugh, with a chuckle, as he surveyed the stout figure of his chum. “Speaking of our interfering—it mustn’t be done hastily.”

“Do you mean that it might get Dr. Merritt wild?” asked the other.

“It would make a bitter enemy out of him, which stands for the same thing,” Hugh said, thoughtfully.

“But I miss my guess, Hugh, if you refuse to lend that poor boy a helping hand when he needs it the worst kind.”

“Scouts seldom do that, you know, Billy.”

“He’s a weak chap, but he’s nerved up to make a try for freedom, whatever the kind of bonds that are holding him may be,” Billy ventured to say, as though he had been figuring the whole case out.

“Yes, that sounds encouraging,” Hugh told him.

“I didn’t find a chance to say a single word to him when next I saw him hovering around the stand where they sell that stuff. He happened to see me, and gave me a nod. Hugh, there was the most mournful look on his face you ever saw. Gee! it’ll sure haunt me for ever so long if we let this game go right along under our

eyes, and don't help Cale."

"For one thing, Billy, make up your mind in the start that we *will* help him!" the scout master declared, firmly.

"Bully for you, Hugh!" exclaimed the stout boy, wringing the hand of the leader of the Wolf Patrol. "When I hear you say that I know the thing's as good as done! Looking back, I can't remember a single time when we failed to win out after you decided to lead the way."

"No blarney, now, Billy," warned the other, shaking his head and smiling. "We've got our hands full trying to figure this thing out. And from what I've seen of that man I should say first of all that he has a violent temper."

"If you heard the way he stormed at the boy inside that tent you'd believe it easy enough!" declared Billy. "Why, he must have had the poor fellow trembling like anything for fear he would be knocked down."

"Now, supposing you devote the rest of this afternoon to watching your chance to talk with Cale," suggested the scout master.

Billy considered this for a moment.

"All right, Hugh," he said, presently. "I can fix that easy enough. What ought I do if I get the chance; how shall I talk to him?"

"Try and find out just what sort of a hold the fakir has on him," advised Hugh.

"You mean ask what he's ever done to be so tight in the grip of such a bad man; is that the idea, Hugh?"

"Yes," replied the other scout, "because if there was nothing except his fear of the man you'd think he would have run away long ago."

"But, Hugh, you're forgetting what I said before?" urged Billy.

"You mean about there being some sort of hypnotism which the 'doctor' exerts over Cale so as to make it impossible for him to break his bonds; is that what you're referring to, Billy?"

“I’m as sure of it, Hugh, as that my name is Billy Worth.”

“Oh, well!” said the scout master, “even if we let it go at that, you must tell Cale he’s got the backing of the scouts, and that we’re bound to see him through. Unless he’s done something terrible, which the man is holding over his head, there’s no reason why he should keep on being a slave in this free country of ours.”

“That’s right, Hugh,” vowed Billy. “I’ll trot along and see if I can give him the wink to let him know I’ve just *got* to have a little chin with him. Depend on me to fix it, if only he shows he’s got the nerve to meet me half way.”

“Wish you luck, Billy!” the scout leader told him, as the stout boy hastened away, bent upon his errand of kindness; for good-hearted Billy Worth was never so happy as when doing something for others.

Another influx of eager and curious visitors at this moment took Hugh’s attention from the affair of the medicine fakir and his dupe. Once more the scout master was called upon to explain some of the duties and rewards that came the way of the wearers of the khaki. That he did his work well could be told in the satisfied remarks made by the groups of visitors as they departed for other fields.

It was a rare pleasure for Hugh to sow the good seed in this fashion. His heart was in the work, for he believed in the mission of the Boy Scouts to lift American lads to a higher plane of usefulness, and to a better way of living.

That must have been a record crowd for Oakvale County Fair, and the oldest inhabitant was heard to declare he had never before seen anything like the outpouring of people from near and from far who attended.

They were everywhere throughout the spacious enclosed grounds given over to the Exhibition of products of the soil, the orchard, the dairy, the hennery, and in fact representing every part of country life.

While the grandstand at the racetrack was packed, and crowds loitered along the fence enclosing the quarter-mile circuit to witness the aëroplane ascent, with its wonderful evolutions, proving the mastery of the pilot over his craft, there was no lack of people in other sections.

They came and went at the camp of the scouts. Hugh had talked so much he was

actually feeling hoarse; but as another hour or so would wind up the show for that day he was bent on sticking to his task to the end.

Arthur helped out, for it happened that there had been no call for his services in the emergency tent. Now and then Hugh would cast a speculative glance over toward the quarter where the amusement zone was located. Doubtless he was wondering why Billy did not show up with some sort of report connected with the boy whom they were desirous of helping.

Still, there would be two more days of the Fair, and if the chance to do something failed to arrive on Thursday, perhaps it would come along on Friday, or even with Saturday. As long as the harvest was there, and could be reaped so easily, it seemed to Hugh there would be little danger of Doc Merritt packing up his stand and clearing out between two days.

“The only danger of that,” mused Hugh, “would be if he was doing such a land-office business there as to sell his entire supply of stuff out, and have to close shop on that account.”

Even then he could hardly believe so fertile a brain as that of the fakir would fail to devise some new means for reaping still further profits by taking up some other device.

It was about this time late in the afternoon when Hugh suddenly became aware of the fact that there had arisen some sort of commotion a little way off. First he thought he could hear angry voices as though men might be quarreling, and this gave him a bad feeling, because so far the fair had been remarkably free from all manner of fights, simply because liquor was not allowed on the grounds.

“What can it be, do you think, Hugh?”

It was Arthur who asked this question, showing that he, too, had not only caught the loud sounds, but was equally mystified in trying to place them.

Other voices joined in with the first ones. Shouts were even heard and then came the yelping of a dog as some man stepped on its tail, or else gave the animal a hearty kick after being almost tripped by having it get under his feet.

Harold Tremaine, who was a comparatively recent addition to the troop, and still looked upon as a tenderfoot, chanced to be at the camp when this furore broke

out. Having an especial antipathy for dogs—for a reason that was connected with a bad scare he had once experienced when a small chap—Harold seized hold of Hugh's sleeve and hastily asked:

“Oh! you don't believe it could be a dog gone mad, do you, Hugh? Wouldn't it be terrible if such a thing as that happened, with all this crowd here, and so many women and children, too?”

“Make your mind easy, Harold,” said the other, without the slightest hesitation, “it isn't a mad dog scare, I'm sure of that.”

“What makes you think so, Hugh?” asked Harold, apparently not so certain in his own mind, and wishing to be reassured.

“If it was that,” said the scout master, “you'd hear men and boys shouting *mad dog* at the top of their voices. With that cry, there never was a time when people kept on flocking *toward* the scene, you know that, Harold!”

“That's a fact, Hugh, certainly it is!” declared the other, in a relieved tone. “Every lasting one of them would run the other way as if he were crazy. As you say, they're pushing up now toward the place where all that loud talking is coming from.”

“Seems to me they're beginning to move this way, too,” remarked Arthur. “If that's so, we'll soon find out what all the trouble is about.”

Hugh saw this for himself. He wondered whether the excitement could have any connection with Billy Worth's mission regarding the breaking of the strange ties between the medicine fakir and Cale.

This idea flashed into his head when he fancied he saw a boy dressed in khaki in the midst of the throng, apparently dodging about, as though he might be concerned in the row. Before Hugh could be sure as to his identity the crowd had once more swallowed him up; but it gave the scout master a little spell of uneasiness.

He found himself imagining all sorts of wild things. Possibly Billy, in his earnest desire to help the boy who was an unwilling assistant in the schemes of Old Doc Merritt, had gone beyond the bounds of prudence; perhaps he had even put himself in danger of being arrested on some charge formulated by the fakir!

Hugh had almost decided to start straight for the scene of confusion, so as to learn the worst, when all of a sudden the tenor of the cries changed. They were now of a more angry nature, such as a reckless mob would utter when chasing after some hapless fugitive.

Looking more closely, Hugh saw a figure burst into view. Many hands tried in vain to seize upon the fleeing boy, but with wonderful agility he seemed to avoid them all, and came madly racing and dodging toward the camp of the scouts.

“Why, looky there, Hugh!” cried Arthur, in surprise, “it’s one of our scouts, as sure as you live! Andy Wallis at that! I wonder what under the sun it all means, and what he can have been doing now!”

Hugh felt a cold hand rest upon his heart. Andy Wallis was one of the later additions to the troop. He had once been a crony of the reformed Lige Corbley; and while nothing had happened to indicate that the boy had not really turned over a new leaf, at the same time Hugh was not absolutely sure about him.

Andy was undoubtedly fearfully worked up. He did not mean that any one should prevent him from reaching the shelter of the scouts’ camp, though what sort of a haven that would prove for him was a question yet to be decided.

The crowd chased after him. Many loud cries were heard and Hugh shivered when he caught some of them, for they sounded like “stop the thief!”

Then the frightened Andy managed to reach the spot where the scout master stood. He threw himself down, and clasped Hugh around the legs, as he cried shrilly:

“Don’t let them take me, Hugh! That little man says I stole his pocketbook, but I give you the word of a scout that I’d sooner die than do a thing like that. You won’t let them arrest me, will you, Hugh? My father will throw me out if they do.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE RIFT IN THE CLOUD.

When Hugh heard this he knew he had a pretty difficult proposition on his hands. There was Andy cowering at his feet, and beseeching him to save him. Close by stood an excited little man who was evidently very angry besides, and in a frame of mind to prefer charges against the accused lad. The crowd that gathered around did not look any too friendly, for a thief is held in low esteem in a country town.

First of all, Hugh knew that it was his duty to stand up for a fellow scout as long as his guilt had not been proved. There were always chances for mistakes being made; and Andy was denying it so frantically that he could not believe the boy guilty of degrading his uniform by stealing.

“He’s telling you a downright lie!” cried the little man shaking his finger threateningly at the boy. “He was right at my heels when I discovered that someone had taken my pocketbook. When I accused him of it he looked frightened and tried to run. I tell you he is the culprit, and I want him arrested.”

“Take things a little more coolly, sir,” advised Hugh. “Nothing is to be gained by being excited. The boy isn’t going to run away. It’s a serious thing to make such an accusation without being sure of what you say. Did you have much money in your pocketbook?”

“All of three hundred dollars, in new bills I just got from the bank,” said the man. “I’m in the chicken business, and meant to buy some fancy blue-ribbon stock while at the Fair. But I was wise enough to mark every one of those ten-dollar bills with a couple of little red crosses. I’d know them again if I saw them.”

“Good for you, Hennery Cooper!” called out someone in the crowd. “That was

what I'd call a smart dodge. Your chickens will come home to roost yet!"

"Andy, what have you got to say about this accusation?" asked Hugh, as he helped to bring the trembling and white-faced boy to his feet again.

"All I can say, Hugh," the other replied, with quivering lip, "is that I never did such a thing. Why, I wouldn't take his pocketbook for anything. I know I've got a bad reputation to live down, but I've been trying hard to do it. He just turned on me, and accused me. It scared me, and I tried to run before I even thought how bad that would look. But, Hugh, I give you my word as a scout that I'm innocent. You believe me, don't you, Hugh?"

Hugh still faced the angry man who claimed to have been robbed.

"So far as I can see, sir," he told him, "you've only accused this boy on general principles. Because he looked frightened when you told him so, and tried to run, you say he is guilty. Now you will have to show better evidence than that in court. Did you see him take your property?"

"Well, er, no, I don't say that exactly; but I'm sure he did!" replied the man.

"There are a good many persons who, if suddenly accused, would be so alarmed that they might lose their heads and run away. Listen to what I'm going to propose to you, Mr. Cooper, if that's your name."

"All right, go ahead, then," said the other, turning to nod to the crowd as if he wanted to be sure of keeping this backing.

"If he took your pocketbook," continued the scout master, "and you discovered your loss so quickly that he had not left your side, the chances are he'd have it on his person, don't you think?"

"Seems like it," assented the other, cautiously.

"Well, would you be satisfied to have his pockets searched by some person present who would act fair and square to both parties?"

"That sounds all right, Hennery!" called out someone.

"You've got to take him up on that offer, Cooper!" said another.

“Get Major Anson here to do the searching; we all know him like a book!” a third man advised.

“Oh, I’m agreeable!” admitted the loser of the missing property.

Hugh turned to Andy.

“Are you willing to let Major Anson look through your pockets, Andy?” he asked.

“Sure I am, Hugh, and I’ll be only too glad of it, because I know right well he won’t find anything on me. I’d be a fool to do such a mean thing when I’m wearing a scout’s uniform. I’d jump in Rainbow Lake first. Do you think I’ve forgotten that my dad told me if I ever went back to my old ways again he’d kick me out of the house? Let him search me and welcome!”

Major Anson was a veteran of the Civil War. He delighted to wear his beloved blue uniform, and his slouch hat with its gold-threaded cord. Everybody knew him, and had the greatest respect for his honesty. He now stepped forward, for like most men the old fellow liked to find himself in the limelight once in a while.

Andy raised both arms as though wishing to make the searching operation as easy for the veteran as he could. Hugh noticed that in place of the frightened expression on his face there was now a little smile of utmost confidence.

“He is surely innocent!” Hugh was saying to himself as he saw this.

The pressing crowd gaped and watched. Perhaps some of them, remembering that in the past this same Andy Wallis has not enjoyed a very good reputation, may have indulged in the expectation that the boy might not be so innocent as he claimed.

All at once Major Anson held something up which he had just taken from one of the scout’s outer coat pockets. Hugh gave a gasp of dismay, for he saw that it was a pocketbook!

“Is this your property, sir?” demanded the veteran.

“What did I tell you?” almost shouted the little man, as he snatched the article

from the other. "It's my pocketbook as sure as anything; but see here, it doesn't hold a single one of those thirty ten-dollar bills I told you about!"

A silence fell upon the crowd. Every eye seemed to be focussed upon the face of the wretched Andy, again white as chalk. He was staring hard at the pocketbook as though it might be an accusing finger pointed straight at him.

"I never took it!" Andy cried, almost choking with emotion. "I say I never saw it before this minute. Somebody must have put it in my pocket if you found it there. Oh, Hugh, don't turn your head away from me; you're all I've got to back me up! *You* believe me, say you do, won't you?"

Hugh would have given a great deal to have felt absolutely sure concerning the boy's innocence. The evidence seemed so strong, added to the past reputation of Andy, that he had to grit his teeth and with a great effort make up his mind to do all he could to solve the puzzle.

"Keep on searching, Major Anson, please," he told the veteran. "You've found the husk, but without the kernel. See if you can discover a single one of those marked ten-dollar bills on the boy!"

Again did Andy allow his person to be gone over, though he was so weak from fear that he would have fallen had not Hugh put an arm about his shoulders. It was the contact with the scout master that held Andy up in that minute of anguish. In such a time the personal touch of a friend's hand is worth more than can be reckoned in money; for it gives confidence, and announces that not quite all the world has turned against the unfortunate one.

Old Major Anson did his part of the business thoroughly. He examined every pocket, and even ran his hand over the lining of the boy's khaki coat as though he suspected some secret hiding-place.

When he had completed his task the veteran nodded to Hugh, and made a salute as one officer might to another.

"There is nothing in the way of money on his person, sir," he reported.

The crowd had waited eagerly, and seemed to anticipate further thrilling disclosures. To most of those who looked on, it was pretty much in the way of a source of amusement; some of them were hoping the wad of stolen bills would

be found. It mattered little to them that a boy's heart was perilously near the breaking point; he was only a boy, and they also remembered that he had once been a rogue under the tutelage of Lige Corbley.

"But don't you see," said the owner of the empty pocketbook, "he must have handed the money over to a confederate. These slick rascals always hunt in pairs, I'm told. Just as soon as he got my property he slipped the bills out and passed them onto some one who walked away while we were making all that row."

"Sounds kind of reasonable to me!" said one man, frowning at the shivering Andy, against whom he may have had a spite of long standing.

"Look up at me, Andy!" said Hugh, sternly, and the boy obeyed quickly, with an expression on his pallid face that Hugh somehow could only compare to the look of a hunted deer that finds its escape cut off, and the savage wolves closing in on all sides.

"What is it, Hugh?" he asked, piteously, wringing his hands as he spoke.

"You still tell me on your word of honor as a scout that you never touched that pocketbook, and never saw it before, do you?"

"I'll keep on saying it as long as I have a breath in my body!" cried the boy. "If they torture me I'll never change my mind, because I didn't take it! I want you to believe I'm trying to live up to a scout's vows, Hugh, sure I am!"

"Well," said Hugh, firmly, "I do believe you, Andy. I'm going to stand by you through thick and thin, at least until they can show more proof than just the finding of an empty pocketbook in your coat would seem to be. The thief might have slipped it in *my* pocket just as easily; but that's no reason people should say *I* stole it."

"Everybody knows and trusts you, Hugh," called out a man; "it's different with him!"

"Yes," Hugh instantly told him, with flashing eyes, "it is different with him, for he's got a past to live down, and I honestly believe he's doing it right well. For shame, that you'd be all the more ready to believe him guilty than any other boy. I've taken the trouble to test him more than once, and he proved faithful to his

trust. We're bound to believe him innocent until he's absolutely proved guilty."

Andy's hand closed convulsively on Hugh's arm when he heard him say that. No matter what might come to him in after life he would never forget how the scout master stood back of him in this, his hour of peril.

"Here comes the Chief," said a man; "and he's the boy's uncle, too!"

"All the same he's got to take him in if I prefer a charge against him, I want you to know!" cried the robbed poultry dealer, angrily. "He won't get off easy because his uncle happens to be at the head of the Oakvale police force."

"No danger of the Chief not doing his duty," he was informed; "he knows his play, and if it was his own boy he'd run him in without a word."

"And I happen to know the Chief used to be mighty sore about this nephew of his when the boy was running with that Corbley gang, and painting the town red," another man sang out.

Hugh was in a quandary. If the little man insisted, the arrest must be made. Aside from the inconvenience it might cause poor Andy there was the disgrace attached to having a boy dressed in the khaki of a scout taken up on the Fair grounds on the charge of being a thief!

"Hugh," said the boy, trying to brace up, "no matter what they say or do I want you to know I'm innocent, and that I'd sooner cut my hand off than do such a thing after I've been getting on so finely. That's all I can say," and he heaved a mighty sigh as though resigning himself to the inevitable.

They tell us that it is always darkest just before dawn, and Hugh had cause to remember this later on. He thought he was feeling about as badly as any one could, and hardly knew which way to turn as the pompous-looking Chief of Police could be seen hurrying toward the spot.

Just then a hearty voice rang out, and somehow it seemed to instantly give Hugh a feeling of greatest relief, even before he caught the tenor of what was said.

"I've kept quiet long enough," said this party. "I wanted to see just how far this thing would go. That boy is innocent, because I saw the man drop that pocketbook in his coat. You know me, I guess. Jones is my name, and it's never

been questioned.”

CHAPTER X.

ONE BOY'S INFLUENCE.

Yes, it was their friend of the other day, Mr. Jones, the same who had helped keep back the crowd at the time Arthur was working over the man injured in the runaway accident.

Again he had bobbed up just at the critical moment. On hearing the splendid news he brought, Hugh felt like giving a shout of joy. As for poor, badgered Andy, his mouth opened, and his eyes grew luminous with tears, but for the life of him he could not give utterance to the mingled emotions that filled his heart.

The little man who had been robbed was not going to give up quite so easily.

“Even if you saw someone drop this empty bill-folder in his pocket, sir, that doesn't prove him innocent. Would you know the thief again if you saw him again?”

Mr. Jones grinned, for he seemed to be greatly amused over something or other.

“Oh, yes, I'm sure I would,” he replied, positively.

“But see here, if you saw him do what he did, you must have guessed he'd emptied the pocketbook before he got rid of it!” blurted the victim.

“I have cut my eye-teeth, let me tell you, my bantam,” said Mr. Jones; and the crowd laughed as it was recalled that the other had confessed to being a poultry dealer, so that the application seemed very pat. “I recognized the game immediately. Once 'on a time I found *three* empty pocketbooks on my own person after being in a crush in the city, where pickpockets were as busy as bees.”

“Then why didn't you do something to have the rascal apprehended, may I ask?”

demanded the other indignantly. "If you saw all you say, and let the thief walk away, you become a party to the crime after the fact, sir!"

"Softly now, my bantam, no names if you please," said Mr. Jones, without displaying any annoyance. "One of the reasons why I was late in arriving on the scene here lay in the fact that I *did* consider it my duty to keep track of that slick rascal, and see where he went. I followed him."

"Then perhaps, sir, you can take us to where he may be found; unless, in the meantime, he's managed to leave the Fair grounds?" continued the victim; naturally eager to recover his lost funds, if it were possible.

Again did Mr. Jones give that odd little chuckle of his. Hugh began to believe the big friendly man must have a card up his sleeve which he meant to play when it suited him.

"I shall be pleased to have you accompany me," said Mr. Jones, "and particularly the Chief here and these Boy Scouts who have been so gallantly standing up for one of their number unjustly accused. Listen, my friend: I followed the thief to the building in which there have been built a number of closets intended for the clothes of the men who were working on the grounds before the Fair opened. He entered one of these, to conceal his ill-gotten plunder, I reckon. Well, I just closed the door, and put a fine big section of joist against it in such a way that mortal man couldn't push it aside. Unless someone has let him out, we'll find him still there. Come along, everybody!"

There was an immediate rush on the part of the crowd; the Chief striding on ahead with Mr. Jones, the man who had lost his money, and a cluster of the Boy Scouts, including Hugh, Arthur, and the delighted Andy, following closely.

As they entered the building referred to, Hugh saw with considerable pleasure that there was a stout section of joist leaning against one of the closet doors. Striding forward, they soon filled that end of the building, with more late comers trying to push in, so that they might see what it was all about.

"Be ready for him, Chief," said Mr. Jones, "because he may be a desperate case." The big officer produced his gun, and stood there in a position to immediately cage the thief as soon as the door was thrown open.

When Mr. Jones cast down the strip of timber that had been so deftly braced

against the closed door so as to make it immovable, out walked a man. He was trying to appear as unconcerned as possible.

“What’s all this row mean?” he demanded. “I found my light overcoat a burden and was meaning to hang it in here and take the key with me when some prank-playing boy shut me in. I shall complain to the management of the Fair about such treatment to visitors.”

“Search him, and see if he has the money on his person!” ordered the Chief, who had been put in touch with the nature of the offense.

The man threatened all sorts of things in retaliation for such an “insult,” but in spite of his words Mr. Jones went through all his pockets. There was no result so far as disclosing any sign of the lost bills.

“Keep him there while I investigate inside,” said the big man. “On finding himself trapped, it would be his policy to hide the stuff somewhere.”

He vanished inside the clothes closet and was heard scratching a number of matches in order to have light. Presently he came out again. The crowd gave a shout as Mr. Jones held up a package of what seemed to be brand-new bank bills.

“See if that is your money, sir!” he told the excited poultry dealer, as he thrust the roll into his hands.

“Yes, yes, for here are the little red crosses I made, just as I told you!” exclaimed the other, in rapture.

“Count them!” continued the big man, as though invested with authority.

Having done this the other announced the result.

“All here, the whole thirty bills; but although I’ve recovered my property I mean to press the charge of robbery against this scamp. Chief, lock him up, and I’ll be at the hearing, I give you my word!”

The caught thief only laughed jeeringly as though he might not be very much alarmed concerning country justice. As the Chief led him away, after actually snapping handcuffs on his wrists, he even turned and called back a few remarks

intended to inform the poultryman that he had been the easiest “picking” he had ever known.

There was a jumble of voices as the crowd pushed out of the building, every one trying to keep pace with Hugh and the other scouts, as well as with Mr. Jones and the man who had luckily recovered his money.

“See here, Mr. Cooper, if that’s your name,” said the big man, suddenly; “you’ve got to apologize to this boy here for accusing him of taking your cash.”

“Sure, I’ll do that quick enough,” said the little man, who was feeling the reaction that followed the recovery of his property. “See here, I’ll make amends for being a little hard on him by giving him one of these fine new ten-dollar bills!”

He held it out to Andy Wallis. Hugh watched to see what would happen, for he saw the boy’s chest heaving convulsively, while his eyes, in which tears had so recently stood, now flashed ominously.

Snatching the bill from the extended hand of the poultry dealer, Andy flung it scornfully to the ground.

“Take back your money!” he said, bitterly. “Do you think I’d touch it after what you’ve been saying about me? Not if you offered me the whole roll. Next time I hope you’ll go a little slow about trying to put a thing like this on a poor boy, just because he happened to be standing near by when some one robbed you, and got scared at being accused.”

“That’s right, Andy; you’re giving it to him straight!” called out a voice, for crowds are as fickle as an April day, and just now every one was believing in the reformation of Andy Wallis, the Chief’s nephew.

The boy paid no attention to those around. He clung to Hugh, remembering that it was the scout master who had said with a ring of sincerity in his voice: “I do believe in you, Andy, and I’m going to stand by you through thick and thin!”

When they could get away from the attending throng, by entering the tent, Andy insisted on wringing the other’s hand again and again. He seemed to be greatly worked up over what had happened.

“You don’t think, Hugh, do you,” he asked, anxiously, “that my dad will be mad if he hears that I was accused of stealing that pocketbook? He is mighty touchy about me nowadays, and says that if I don’t toe the chalk-line this time for keeps, he’ll send me away up to an old uncle of mine who hates boys, and would make life miserable for me.”

“I shall take pains to see your father this very evening, and tell him the whole thing,” said Hugh. “He ought to be proud of what you’ve done, and I mean to let him understand that every fellow in Oakvale Troop is pulling for you, Andy. I know just as well as I’m standing here that nothing can ever make you go back to the old life again, now that you’ve had a taste of what it means to have people respect you. Make your mind easy on that score.”

“Hugh, you’re the best friend I ever had,” said Andy, now actually breaking down and crying like a baby, for the boy had gone through a terrible experience, calculated to shatter his nerves badly. “I never would have held out if it hadn’t been that I knew *you* believed in me. Now nothing on earth is going to make me go back on my word. I’d die sooner than deceive a friend like you.”

Hugh finally got him quieted down, so that when he had washed his face and his inflamed eyes, Andy was in condition to step out again, and wander off. Now that the experience was a thing of the past, he would feel all the better for having been tried and found not wanting.

Arthur was engaged in attending to a child that had been hurt in some trivial way, but whose fond mother was greatly concerned. So Hugh, stepping out once more, glanced around to ascertain if he could see any signs of the long-absent Billy.

One of the first things he set eyes on was the well-known figure of the stout chum hastening toward him, making signs as though he had something of importance to communicate.

Apparently Billy had known nothing of what had happened. He must have been over in the section of the grounds laid off for amusements; and as there were frequent outbursts of shouting on the part of groups of fun-loving boys, he had not been attracted by the excitement attending the discovery of the robbery and the accusation of Andy Wallis.

“I want you to come with me, Hugh,” panted Billy as he joined the other; “the

show will close up for to-day in half an hour more, and there's something going on over here we ought to take a hand in."

"I'll go along with you, Billy," Hugh told him. "First of all, tell me, did you get a chance to speak with the boy?"

"Yes, but I couldn't say much, because the crowd's big and sales whopping, so it kept Cale busy. Then the man looked like he could eat me alive, every time he saw me. He must guess we're on his trail, and mean to get the boy away from his evil influence. Why, he even shook his head at me once, and scowled just like a pirate. He shows his white teeth when he does that, and it makes you shiver, you just can't help it, Hugh!"

"You told Cale the scouts wanted to help him, did you, Billy?"

"Yes, that's about the size of it, Hugh."

"How did he seem to take it?"

"I thought at first he seemed pleased; but then that old frown came back on his face again, and he shook his head. 'I'd like to, ever so much, tell your friends,' he went on to say, Hugh, and in such a wistful tone, too, it'd have made you feel sorry for him like it did me, if you heard him, 'but it just can't be. He's got me tied down fast, hand and foot. I don't dare call my soul my own. When I want to turn and run I feel something grip me that makes me go back to him. I hate him like I would a spider or a snake, but I ain't my own boss, and I can't ever hope to run away from him!' Hugh, I told you how it was; that man has control over his mind."

"We'll soon find that out," said the scout master.

"Yes, for there's Cale now, leaning against that post again; and see how black and hopeless his face looks, Hugh! I certainly want to do something to help him give that man the slip!"

CHAPTER XI. BACKED BY THE SCOUTS.

“We’ll stop here a bit, and try to catch his eye,” said Hugh.

“I was thinking myself that would be a good idea,” promptly agreed Billy, who had the greatest possible faith in the persuasive ability of the scout master. He felt absolutely certain that if only Hugh could get in touch with the badgered boy, Cale was sure to decide on breaking away from his master.

“Here comes Walter Osborne,” remarked Hugh.

He knew why the Hawk leader must have been loitering around that particular part of the Fair grounds. Walter undoubtedly was still worrying himself almost sick over his queer inability to place the boy who went by the name of Cale. In order to try and freshen his memory somewhat he had wandered over this way, in the hope that seeing the other’s face occasionally might help out.

As he now came up, Hugh looked at him inquiringly. There was such a depressed expression on Walter’s face that words were wholly unnecessary to explain the utter failure that had overwhelmed his plan of campaign.

“Nothing doing, Hugh,” he muttered in a tone of abject disgust. “Came near saying it once, but got side-tracked. I never had a thing give me half the bother that this does; but it isn’t my way to give up. I’ll hit it yet, see if I don’t.”

Hugh smiled as he went on to say:

“I’ll give you a little pointer, Walter, that may help out. We’re calling that chap Cale, but how do we know that’s his name? It’s true he told Billy here it was, but sometimes boys that take to bad ways feel it best to adopt a name that’s different from the one they used to sport. How about that, Walter?”

“I never thought of it before, Hugh!” exclaimed the other, his face lighting up; “and I tell you it’s a good idea. To-night I’m going to run over every kind of a boy’s name I ever heard, and try to see if any one fits.”

“Well, now that you’re here with us, Walter,” the scout master told him, “you’d better stay. We may need more help before we’re done.”

“Hello! what’s up, Hugh?” demanded the leader of the Hawks.

Hugh thereupon told him a few things in connection with the boy called Cale that was news to Walter. He showed the greatest interest in all he heard, and was only too willing to join forces with them.

“I must say I don’t like the looks of that medicine fakir any more than the rest of you do,” Walter announced. “I’d like to have a hand in getting that boy out of his clutches. Perhaps he’s got a good home somewhere, and has been tempted to run away. Right now some old mother may be crying her eyes out because she doesn’t know where Cale is. Yes, count me in, Hugh, no matter what happens.”

“It’s almost time for the Fair to close, for the sun’s setting,” Hugh remarked. “So, whatever we expect to do, we’ll have to get busy now. There, the boy has started off in the direction of their tent with that last bottle of stuff he made out to buy, so as to get the hesitating countrymen to hand up their dollars. This is our chance, I take it, fellows. Come on!”

They followed after the skulking boy. Hugh noticed that there was a certain hang-dog air about Cale that may have come from the utter collapse of his pride. He was evidently heartily ashamed of his occupation as a decoy for the fake doctor, and felt that others were eyeing him in scorn. Still, for some secret cause he seemed to lack the nerve to break his bonds and give the medicine fakir the slip.

When Hugh and the other scouts reached the tent with its little sign of “Old Doc Merritt” the boy had vanished, but as they had seen him pass inside, there was no question as to his whereabouts.

“Now, as long as he can keep a dozen people around him, and have the chance to sell another bottle of his stuff, the fakir is apt to stay by his stand,” said the scout master. “That ought to give us five or ten minutes to talk with Cale, and get him away.”

“It is time enough,” Billy added, “for I know he’ll be ready to throw himself on our hands once you get talking to him like a Dutch uncle, Hugh.”

“There he comes out again,” announced Walter.

Hugh immediately led the way up to the boy, who saw their approach with mingled emotions, if his changing color several times could be taken as any indication of his feelings.

He looked nervously around him. Hugh knew his first fear was that the fakir might happen upon them before anything was settled. Hope was battling with his old sense of helplessness.

Hugh never beat around the bush when there was need of haste. He walked straight up to the boy and held out his hand.

“Cale, we scouts have made up our minds that we’ve just got to take hold of your case and help you break away from that man,” said Hugh, in his positive way that usually carried conviction with it. “If only you’ll say the word we’ll stand back of you, and get you out of this scrape. You don’t want to keep doing this sort of business any longer, do you?”

“I hate it worse than poison,” said the boy, almost fiercely; “but seems as if I couldn’t break loose from Doc Merritt nohow. I’ve made up my mind to run away as many as twenty times, but it only takes one look from those terrible eyes of his to change everything.”

“But you’ll let us try to get you off, won’t you, Cale?”

The boy sighed.

“Oh! if you only could!” he said, plaintively. “I’m willing enough to go, but you fellows will have to do it all, because I’m as weak as a kitten when he catches my eye. I have to sneeze when he takes snuff, as they say.”

Hugh remembered that later on, and took advantage of his knowledge, as will be seen when the time comes.

“Would you be willing to start home to your folks if we bought you a railroad ticket?” asked the scout master, as he linked an arm with that of the other, and

started leading him away, making sure that he went in an opposite direction to the stand of the fakir.

The boy trembled on hearing this, and Hugh knew that his guess must have hit the mark. There was a story back of it, which might mean a waiting mother, a wayward boy, a yielding to temptation, and finally his getting into the grip of the fakir, who, for certain reasons of his own, seemed determined that Cale should not leave his employ, though he treated him as meanly as any slave.

“Y-e-s, I would be dreadfully glad to go home again if I only had the chance,” he faltered, almost breaking down when he said that one magical word “home.” Then, sighing heavily again, he continued: “I don’t know whether they’d want me to come back again after the awful thing I did. He keeps telling me they’ve disowned me for good. But sometimes at night, when I get to thinking it over, I can’t bring myself to believe my *mother* would do that, no matter how bad I was.”

“That’s right, Cale, you can bet your mother will stand back of you!” burst out Billy, whose heart was beating in sympathy for the wretched boy. “Specially if she knows you’ve turned over a new leaf, and mean to walk straight after this. You tell her that the first thing, and it’s going to be all right, believe me!”

Cale smiled in a wan sort of way, as he nodded his head.

“I kind of guess pretty near all mothers are alike that way,” he said. “I’ve been a bad boy, and tried to break my mother’s heart with my doings; but, say, I’ve had a terrible lesson. I don’t pity myself one bit, because I deserved all I got, and heaps more. But if ever I do get another chance, I’ll show what there is in me or die a-trying.”

“That’s the stuff!” declared Billy, vehemently.

Walter could not keep from reaching out and gripping the other’s hand; for the time being he had even forgotten all about the mystery connected with Cale, in his sympathy for the other’s troubles.

“Well, it’s all over now, Cale,” he said, as warmly as he could. “If you let us engineer this thing, we’ll see you through. When Hugh here takes on a job he never draws back. Just you make up your mind that you’ve seen the last of that man, and it ends it all.”

“If he finds out that I’ve gone, he’ll chase after me like hot cakes,” said Cale uneasily, looking over his shoulder as he spoke, as though half fearing he might discover the black-eyed fakir hurrying along, bent on snatching him away from the custody of these new friends.

“All right, let him come,” said Billy, as he stooped and possessed himself of a likely looking stick that in case of emergency might be made to serve in the capacity of a cudgel.

Hugh just then gave utterance to a peculiar sound—at least it might have seemed strange in the ears of any one not connected with a scout troop.

“How-ooo-ooo!”

It was a very fair imitation of the howl of the gray wolf. It was instantly recognized by a couple of boys clad in khaki at the gates. Ralph Kenyon and Jack Durham looked around at hearing the call of the Wolf Patrol, to which both of them belonged. Seeing their chums, and that Hugh was beckoning to them, they waited for the others to come up.

Hugh had an object in this. He was not sure but what they were fated to have some trouble with the fakir before they could get the boy started on the train he would want to take in order to reach his home. In that event numbers would be apt to cut some figure in deterring Doc Merritt from trying to take Cale from them by force. Five were better than three, especially when the additional reinforcements were a pair of husky fellows like Jack and Ralph.

One thing Hugh had noticed, which was that the boy made no attempt to tell them what his name was, or where he lived. Of course, after he got his ticket they would be apt to learn this fact; which Walter might consider a clue toward lifting the veil of mystery that seemed to cling about the identity of the other.

After leaving the Fair grounds, they headed along the thoroughfare leading into the town of Oakvale. Hundreds were going that way, with all sorts of vehicles filling the road itself, from fine cars to humble wagons, and even bicycles.

The grounds in which the yearly Exhibition was held were some little distance from the station. Perhaps ten minutes’ walk would be necessary in order to take them there, for rapid progress was out of the question on account of the congestion of the highway.

Cale was plainly nervous. He walked between Hugh and Billy, who had hold of his arms, but every minute the boy was seen to half look behind him, as though in imagination he could hear the hateful voice of the fakir ordering him to stop this foolishness and come back to his duties.

On his part, Hugh was fully determined that now they had started in this thing they would fight it through to a finish. What was the use of putting a hand to the plow unless they went to the end of the furrow? If Doc Merritt tried force, they would meet him half way. Should he appeal to the law, Hugh was ready to have all the conditions of Cale's servitude exposed, no matter at what cost, and the boy separated from his cruel oppressor, who exercised such a strange influence over him.

Now they had gone two-thirds of the distance, and having shaken off most of the crowd by taking a side street in the town, could see the station ahead of them.

It was at this moment that Ralph Kenyon, always on the alert as became one who in times past, when he followed the profession of an amateur trapper, had pitted his sagacity against the cunning of small fur-bearing animals, uttered an exclamation.

"There's somebody chasing after us lickety-split in a buggy, Hugh!" he said. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if it turned out to be that medicine fakir, Old Doc Merritt!"

CHAPTER XII. AT THE STATION.

“I knew it!”

Hugh could feel the figure of the boy partly collapse as he muttered these disconsolate words. He only tightened his clasp on Cale’s arm.

“Don’t worry a bit about it,” he said, in the other’s ear. “We’re not going to let him put a hand on you. Just try your level best to keep from looking at him; and leave the rest to us. We’ll see you through, and let him try to take you away if he dares!”

“Well, I’d like to see him try it, that’s all!” blustered Billy, swinging that nice club of his with a “swish” that sounded encouraging to him.

This sort of talk began to buoy up the spirits of Cale.

“I’ll try and hold out, fellows!” he told them. “You don’t know that man. He can make you do just what he wants. It’s simply fierce what a way he has of changing your mind for you!”

“Huh! I’d like to see him get me to change mine, that’s all!” Billy chuckled.

“Well, here he comes, and now we’ll see some fun!” declared Jack Durham, as the rapid beating of horse’s hoofs reached their ears, accompanied by a man’s angry voice.

“Stop right where you are, I tell you, boy! I want you to go back with me in this buggy! You are under contract with me, understand!”

“We might as well stop and have it out with him,” remarked Hugh.

“Yes, since we couldn’t expect to run away from a horse,” added Walter.

So they stepped to one side of the road, and as the vehicle arrived the man in the buggy stopped his sweating horse by drawing sharply on the lines.

“Here, what do you boys mean trying to kidnap my assistant?” he shouted, shaking the whip he held in a menacing manner.

Hugh stepped in front of Cale, one of his objects being to keep the boy from meeting those angry and glittering eyes of the fakir.

“I’d advise you to keep that whip to yourself, sir,” he said, meaningly. “If you have any idea of trying to use it on us you had better think twice. With the first stroke I promise that you’ll find it snatched from your hand, and used on your back without mercy.”

“Yes,” added Billy Worth, “because we’re scouts, don’t think we can’t protect ourselves if set on. The rules don’t keep us from defending ourselves from assault.”

Perhaps the man did not quite like the determined manner of those five boys in khaki; at any rate he stopped switching the whip in that menacing manner, though at the same time continuing to scowl blackly at Hugh.

“What does this mean?” he demanded. “Don’t you boys know you’re liable to arrest for trying to entice my assistant to break his contract with me in the middle of my harvest season? I’ll have the law on you, and lock you all up!”

Billy Worth laughed aloud.

“You sure make us shiver with fright, Mister Merritt, if that’s your real name,” he told the other. “Hugh, tell him to go to thunder, and that we’re not one mite afraid of his bluster. Cale’s going with us if we have to pick him up and carry him.”

Perhaps Billy had a double reason for talking in this way. He may have intended to warn the fakir that they would resist him to the utmost; but more than that it was of importance that the boy should feel they were determined to keep him from obeying the will of his employer.

“Cale!” said the man, sharply, using a peculiar tone which doubtless was inclined to affect the boy more than his natural voice.

Hugh continued to stand between.

“Don’t look at him, Cale!” he said, forcefully.

“Come right here and get in with me, I tell you!” continued the man, sternly.

Cale made a mechanical move.

“I’ve got to go!” he muttered, helplessly, whereat Billy linked his arm more tightly in his, while Walter did the same on the other side, with Ralph and Jack pushing to the front alongside Hugh.

“Not much you will,” said Billy, derisively. “Think we’ve gone to all this trouble with you to give up so easy? You’re going to stick it out with us, Cale, hear me talking? We won’t let you go worth a cent!”

“Start off toward the station with him, fellows,” said Hugh, grimly. “We’ll stand guard on this side of you. Keep fast hold of Cale all the while. Once we get there I’ll call up Chief Wallis, and get him over to settle this thing. He’s a good friend of ours, you know.”

The man in the buggy seemed hardly to know what to do next when they started along the street heading for the railroad station, now in plain sight. He must have guessed that his grip on poor Cale was broken through the persistence of these five scouts, and yet, being a most stubborn sort of man, he evidently did not mean to give up until he had exhausted every means for attaining his purposes.

He started up his horse so as to keep even with them. He began to appeal to the boy to stand by him. He used every device which in the past had acted so favorably in forcing Cale to obey his will; but the conditions, with those five guardians striding alongside the weak boy, were changed now.

Billy, not wishing Cale to hear much that the fakir said, kept up more or less of a racket. He whistled shrilly, laughed, and even started to sing snatches of some rollicking school song, such as scouts were accustomed to rolling out in concert when seated about their campfire of nights, after their bountiful suppers.

In this manner they drew nearer the station. Hugh would often look back at that last hundred yards of the journey with amusement. Billy was really making himself ridiculous in his endeavor to drown the voice of Doc Merritt, so that it might not have its intended effect on the boy whom they had taken in charge.

There were a good many people waiting for the trains, because one would draw in from either direction presently. Hugh had already learned that Cale wanted to go west from Oakvale; and this meant there was no great hurry, since that train was not due to arrive for twenty minutes after the one for the east came along.

One thing still bothered Hugh. It concerned the future actions of Doc Merritt. If the medicine fakir, for some reason or other, wanted to keep hold of Cale, he might think it worth his while to go aboard the same train as the boy for the purpose of getting hold of him when the scouts would no longer stand as a bulwark between his victim and himself.

Just how that was to be avoided was a puzzling question. Hugh was inclined to turn to Chief Wallis as a means for detaining the fakir. If they could prevent him from taking that train, by trumping up some sort of charge that would detain him in Oakvale an hour or so, all might yet be well.

“By that time the boy ought to be far on the way home,” Hugh told himself as he thought it all over. “At any rate, he will be beyond the reach of this man’s evil influence. Yes, that seems to be the best thing to do. I’ll try and get the Chief over as soon as the train for the east pulls out again.”

He said that because even then he heard a whistle down the track indicating the approach of the train from the west.

When they reached the station, the man jumped from his vehicle, and gave the rig in charge of a boy to look after. He persisted in following them as they threaded their way through the crowds that surged this way and that—for scores of people had come from up and down the road to attend the Fair, and were taking the last opportunity to get back home at a reasonable hour.

The man was still trying to get in touch with Cale, though the scouts had formed a complete circle around the boy, and he dared not use violence. Hugh began to suspect the fakir had in mind just such an idea as he himself had been considering; that is, he meant to board the same train that bore Cale off.

This scheme must have struck Walter about that time, which would account for his saying to the scout master:

“Hugh, he’s a sure-enough sticker, that man is, and he won’t see Cale go off on that train without making another try to get him, mark my words.”

“We’ll have to set up a game on him, then,” remarked Billy. “It would never do to let him be in the same car as Cale. The boy would give in as quick as anything. Hugh, how can we do it?”

“I’ve got a scheme in mind,” Hugh told him; “just wait until this train pulls out, and there’s a little more room. Then I’ll start things moving. We’ll put a peg in his game. He’ll have to anchor in Oakvale to-night, even if we get him locked up on a charge of assault.”

“Oh! I see what you mean now,” declared Billy. “We are to rattle him the best we know how till he gets peeved enough to lay that whip on one of us. Then you’ll have him arrested, and held at the station house till after the train goes. Say, that’s a great dodge, Hugh! When it comes to thinking up things, you’re in a class by yourself. Some day you’ll be one of our ambassadors abroad, I honestly believe.”

The coming of the train prevented any further exchange of opinions among the five scouts. They continued to keep Cale shut in, preventing the man from fixing that terrible gaze of his on the boy’s eye. Several times the look which the fakir gave them told that he was angry enough to almost start to using the whip which somehow he still kept in his hand; but thinking better of it he wisely refrained from active measures.

It might be the sight of Billy’s swinging stick that deterred him. Then again he may have determined to bide his time and put into operation a little scheme that had occurred to him along the very lines Hugh had considered.

These boys were in their home town, while he was a stranger there, and known as a fakir at that. He could not count on any sympathy in case of an open rupture at the station. There was even a strong possibility that he might be roughly handled in the bargain by the gathered throng.

The ringing of the engine bell as the train came into the station announced to the hurrying crowd that it was time to get aboard.

“I wish this was my train,” Hugh heard the boy say, as though he had begun to fear the long delay, with that man hovering so close, bent, too, on once more regaining control over his will.

“Never mind, it will come along inside of twenty minutes,” said the scout master. “In the meantime we’ll try to fix him so he can’t bother you. Just keep a stiff upper lip, Cale, and everything is going to come out right.”

“Oh, I hope so, I hope so!” the anxious boy was saying to himself, as he clasped and unclasped his hands.

“Better step inside here, fellows, and let those passengers go by,” suggested Jack Durham at this juncture.

A number of travelers had left the cars, and were making their way as best they could through the crowd, heading in the direction of the station building further along the platform.

The confusion was at its height, with the engine letting off surplus steam with a hissing sound that prevented conversation to a great extent. Hugh, still guarding the rescued Cale, turned to glance at the newcomers. He supposed, of course, that for the most part they would be relatives of the town people, coming to have a look at the County Fair before it closed its gates on Saturday afternoon.

A voice at his elbow startled Hugh; it was Walter crying out excitedly.

“Oh! that must be Uncle Reuben and Aunt Ruth! Why, I’d almost forgotten they were coming on this train. Hold on here! Hugh, stop him, can’t you; he’s trying to break away from us! Here, Cale, what ails you?”

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW IT TURNED OUT.

As he turned at hearing this outburst from Walter, Hugh saw something that surprised him very much. Cale was no longer standing there with bowed head, trying to keep his eyes away from the burning gaze of the fakir. He was staring in the direction of the oncoming passengers who had just left the standing train, staring as though he could hardly believe his eyes.

Even as Hugh looked he saw Cale suddenly push Walter and Billy aside as though nothing could hold him back. Straight toward the couple in advance he ran, then stood still in front of them, and uttered a loud cry.

Hugh saw the middle-aged gentleman and stout lady pause. The packages she was holding fell with a crash to the platform; her two arms were outstretched eagerly; and as the scouts stared as though in a dream they saw the boy folded in his mother's convulsive clasp, while she rained kisses on his face, and the man, too, looked radiant with new-found joy.

Walter leaned up against the scout master weakly.

"Hugh, oh, Hugh, what do you say to that? Just to think, it was my own cousin Spencer, after all, and I didn't know it. Yes, and I believe his middle name is Caleb, too. Well! well! well! if this isn't the greatest thing I ever ran up against. There, the boy's pointing at Old Doc Merritt now, and see how the fakir is trying to sneak away, will you? He knows his cake is all dough, doesn't he, Hugh?"

"I think your uncle and aunt have recognized him, Walter," Hugh remarked. "From the way they are acting, and exchanging remarks, I wouldn't be much surprised if we found that Doc Merritt had a purpose in trying to pull your cousin down to his own low level."

In the end it actually proved to be so. Aunt Ruth had recognized a man who once upon a time, many years before, had been anxious to have her marry him, and upon being turned down for Reuben, had taken it hard, even to uttering threats. Chancing to meet the boy, he soon found that he could influence him to do his bidding; and in this way, in the end, he had caused him to run away, under the belief that he had done something so terrible that his folks could never forgive him for it.

Hugh and Walter saw the boy beckoning to them, and hastened to join the party, as did the other scouts as well, all of them being greatly elated over the way things were turning out.

“I owe it all to these fine fellows,” the boy was saying to his mother, as he gripped Hugh and Billy by the hand; then he was more than astonished to see Walter kiss his aunt, shake hands with his uncle, telling them at the same time who he was.

Cale did not look like the same boy. No longer was that dejected, hunted expression upon his face. Instead, his countenance fairly glowed with happiness, for like magic all those black clouds had been swept aside, and the sun was beating down on him. Not only was he freed forever from those hateful bonds of servitude that had kept him glued to the fortunes of the fakir, but he had been reconciled to those parents whom he had come to fear were lost to him forever.

It was a jolly party that started to walk to Walter’s house. Spencer, as they must now learn to call the boy known as Cale, clung to Hugh and his cousin. There were many explanations to be made, but by degrees all would be told. Meanwhile that mother and father were contented to know that while their boy had been lost, he was found again; all else mattered little to them.

Hugh was more than satisfied with the splendid way in which things had turned out. When he, Billy, Ralph and Jack started home, after seeing the rest of the party to the Osborne house, he expressed himself in no uncertain tones along these lines:

“Why, if we’d had the arrangement of things in our own hands, boys, I don’t see how we could have made any improvement on that wind-up at the station. There were the repentant boy, the forgiving mother and father, and the baffled plotter, all mixed up in a bunch. It was a glorious end to our little helping-hand

business.”

“And, Hugh,” said Billy, “I really believe that boy will make good after the bitter experience he’s passed through.”

“I’m sure of it,” declared the scout master. “It’s been a terrible lesson to him, and yet, in the end, may have been the greatest thing that could have happened. Bad as he’s been treated, he might have gone to a worse end if this thing hadn’t come to him. Now he will strive to show that forgiving mother what’s in him.”

“I feel like shaking hands with myself just to know I’ve had anything at all to do with cheating that hound of a fakir out of his prey,” said Jack Durham.

“You’re just taking the words out of my mouth when you say that, Jack!” announced Ralph Kenyon, who had been intensely interested in trying to understand just what it was all about; for up to the time he joined the group at the gates of the Fair grounds, Ralph had known nothing at all about the plans of Hugh and Billy to save Cale.

“One thing sure,” said Billy, “we’ll miss the soft, oily voice of Old Doc Merritt on the grounds to-morrow. He’ll never have the nerve to stay around Oakvale after what he saw at the station this evening. A late train to-night will take him away, you mark my words if it isn’t so.”

Sure enough, there was no medicine sold at the Fair on the next day, or Saturday, either; and those disappointed purchasers who may have come back to demand the return of their dollars because the Wonderful New Life Remedy had failed to do what the fakir claimed for it, had their trouble for their pains, and, as Billy said, “their pains also for their trouble.”

CHAPTER XIV.

STOPPED ON THE ROAD—CONCLUSION.

All the same that was not the last some of the boys saw of the exposed fakir, as it turned out.

Doc Merritt must have easily guessed who was chiefly to blame for his latest troubles. When the scouts were taking his wretched dupe in hand, and leading him away from the controlling influence of the hypnotist, the man understood just whom he had to thank.

He was of a morose, revengeful disposition, and after brooding over the situation through that night determined that before he quitted the lucrative stand he had at the Fair he would attempt to have some sort of revenge.

Hugh, it will be remembered, had not fancied his looks from the start. He sized the man up as not only a humbug but the possessor of a mean disposition as well. Still he hardly imagined the bogus doctor would go to the end he did in order to even the score, and leave town feeling that he had paid the scouts back for having taken his valuable assistant away from him.

A pleasant surprise awaited Hugh that same Thursday evening after supper. He was called up on the 'phone by the head of the School Board, who informed him that at a late meeting of the said committee it had been resolved to give all the members of the Oakvale Troop of Boy Scouts the entire day off on Friday.

This was done as a small measure of appreciation for the splendid work the lads were accomplishing during Fair week.

He desired that Hugh Hardin should get in communication with all the members of the troop that evening, and notify them that they would be at liberty from school duties for the balance of the week.

Of course this gave the scout master considerable pleasure. It was not only the fact that he and his mates were to have a holiday, but it showed how their work was being appreciated by the community at large, as represented by the efficient School Board.

So Hugh had kept the wire busy for some little time, with the result that every fellow who wore the honored khaki in Oakvale went to bed that night weary enough after a strenuous day, but with a generous glow around the region of his boyish heart.

Appreciation is a big thing, and spurs even a boy on to do his level best. That School Board knew what it was doing in commending the scouts for their work. Praise judiciously bestowed seldom does any harm, but on the contrary rekindles the fire of determination to excel.

The gates of the Fair would not open until ten o'clock, but before that time many of the hard-working scouts were abroad, skirmishing for strangers in town, or in sundry other ways trying to earn the right to turn in their badges early in the day.

Hugh himself had something to do at home, and did not get started for the grounds until near the time for the opening of the gates to the general public.

In fact, Ralph Kenyon and Jack Durham looked in at the Hardin place on their way, and were just in time to join the young scout master.

Chattering like magpies, at first they struck out along a side road that would make a shortcut to the grounds, situated some little distance outside the town limits.

This particular road was not much used by the general public. It ran through a stretch of woods that at certain times in the year were apt to be exceedingly damp. Still, as the scouts well knew, it would cut down the tramp, and this meant considerable to fellows who expected to be on their feet the balance of that summery day.

Somehow about the time they struck this patch of timber the conversation seemed to flag, and no one said anything for several minutes, though they kept pushing ahead all the same.

In the distance they could hear the Oakvale Brass Band practicing at their stand

in the Fair grounds. There was to be some sort of unusual review on this day, and extra music would be required.

“There’s one thing sure,” remarked Jack Durham, with a twinkle in his eye, “our band isn’t in the same class with one I read about the other day.”

“How’s that, Jack?” questioned Ralph; “tell us about it, won’t you?”

“Why, it seems that the advance agent of a show had struck a certain town, and when trying to make arrangements for a parade that would attract attention he chanced to say to the leading citizen:

“I understand, sir, that your town boasts a fine brass band?”

“Well, stranger,’ said the citizen, shaking his head solemnly; ‘we got a brass band all right, but we don’t boast none of the same—we just *endures* it!’”

Ralph was about to burst into a hearty laugh when the scout master uttered a warning hiss.

“Listen, there’s some one talking ahead there around that bend, and I thought I caught a familiar voice that sounded like our Billy Worth.”

At that the other two strained their ears to listen, not that the first thought of anything out of the way had up to that moment given them the first sensation of a thrill.

But no sooner did they hear what Billy was saying than they turned to exchange surprised glances. Plainly Billy was giving some one a straight-out defiance. The first suspicion the trio of scouts had was that some of their old enemies of the town, the good-for-nothing type of boys, had crossed Billy’s path, and considered the meeting in the lonely stretch of woods a splendid chance to pay back old scores.

They quickly realized their mistake, however, when they heard what Billy was saying so boldly.

“I didn’t mean to go around boasting about having a share in that little game, but since you ask me if I had a hand in getting Cale away from your clutches I’m free to say *I did!* So put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mister Doc Merritt.”

“Whew! that’s the racket, is it?” muttered Jack Durham, beginning to roll back his coat cuffs as though he scented trouble, and might not be averse to taking a hand in the same, for in times past Jack had been something of a fighter.

“Come on, let’s hurry around there before he tries to hurt our Billy,” suggested Ralph; and as this suited Hugh to a fraction, they immediately quickened their pace to a run, and hurried to the bend in the road.

Loud and angry voices could now be heard and that of the baffled fakir rang out above the tantalizing words Billy was hurling at him.

“I’ve got a good notion to take it out of your hide, no matter what the consequences are. You boys were the cause of all my trouble. Before you got your finger in the pie things were going as smoothly as I could wish, but you had to get up a pack of lies, and coax my assistant away from me.”

“Well, you were exerting an evil influence over Cale,” snapped Billy. “He just happened to be a good subject for your silly old hypnotism. I’d like to see you try to make *me* do your will. You’d have a sweet time of it, Mister Fakir, and that’s right. Now, I’m going ahead to the Fair, and I’d trouble you to get out of my way.”

“Just hold on till I’m through with you, boy,” the man was heard to say. “You need taking down off your high horse. For three cents I’d give you the licking you need.”

“Oh! you would, eh? Well, begin and try it if you think it’d be so easy a job!” cried Billy, tauntingly, and as the other fellows came bustling around the bend just then they saw he was swinging a stick belligerently, as though meaning to make the best possible use of the same should the man actually assault him.

Of course when Hugh and his two companions put in an appearance the quack doctor instantly changed his mind. He might have whipped one scout, though Billy looked as though he intended to put up a game battle; but four meant a larger bite than he felt he could masticate.

So Doc Merritt shrugged his shoulders and with a sneer on his dark face slipped in among the trees, his act implying that he had changed his mind. Nor did any of them think it a duty to chase after him in order to let the tricky fellow know what they thought of his cowardly tactics.

Only Jack Durham did look so disappointed as he unwillingly unrolled the cuffs of his coat.

“Why didn’t we hold up just a little, till he got busy, and had actually hit Billy?” was the burden of his complaint; but the others only laughed at him, and said things were all right as they stood.

So the four of them continued on their way to the Fair grounds. Hugh was glad to have noticed that the fakir looked as though he might be heading out of Oakvale, perhaps meaning to intercept the stage running over the mountain road to another town, where there was some sort of Harvest Home about to start among the farmers of the community. His harvest would come from raking in the shekels when he had hypnotized the farmers, and made them believe his cure-all must be the greatest thing under the sun.

So the third day of the great Fair began, with the scouts on deck, and just as bent on earning the right to the title of “guides” as ever. Hugh was proud of all they had accomplished; and his ready words of commendation always brought a flush of pleasure to the cheeks of his chums.

The scouts continued to carry out their useful plan of campaign while the great Fair lasted. They won golden opinions from visitors and townspeople for the unflinching courtesy with which they performed their various labors.

Arthur Cameron had a rather difficult surgical undertaking which he managed with such astonishing skill as to win a mention of his work in the next issue of a certain well-known medical journal. This came about through the local Red Cross doctor having sent in a highly complimentary mention of the emergency hospital on the Fair grounds, and the clever manner in which the scouts carried out their work of “first aid to the injured.”

There was not a dissenting opinion in all Oakvale when a vote of thanks was sent in at the next meeting of the scouts and which covered their activities during Fair week. Indeed, many persons were ready to declare that the splendid way in which Hugh and his uniformed followers had carried out their difficult duties made them proud to say they lived in Oakvale.

All of this was very pleasant for the boys. They had had to fight down strong opposition when the troop was first started, and there had been numerous skeptics from time to time who would not see things in their true light; but as

Billy Worth was fond of saying, “if you searched Oakvale with a fine-tooth comb nowadays, you’d find it hard to discover a single kicker, or one who didn’t believe the scout movement had been the greatest uplifting influence that had ever struck the town.”

[\[See Transcriber’s Notes\]](#)

[...] chanced to have had a part in the happening he invariably spoke of it as “we did this.” Then in the midst of his story came the appearance of Peter, the bound boy, with his thrilling tale concerning the little charges whom he had had to temporarily abandon while he went in search of assistance. After that there followed the finding of the youngsters, the triumphant return to the farm-house, the coming of Mr. Barger, and finally, most astonishing of all, the discovery that the black-faced man they had supposed was the hired help should prove to be Addison Prentice’s father.

As all the scouts knew about the decided opposition shown by the quarry-owner toward their organization, when they learned of his wonderful conversion a series of hearty cheers made the slumbering echoes in the woods awaken.

“That ought to make it unanimous for the scouts in and around Oakvale,” asserted Alec, boisterously. “I can’t seem to remember another person of consequence willing to say a single word against the troop. We’ll have every patrol filled to the limit before a month [rolls by.]”

[... Cale had feared] that it would be his fate to always follow Doc Merritt about from fair to fair, playing the ignoble part of assistant to a fakir.

Now, as though the magic wand of a magician had touched his case, all this was changed. Walter Osborne had a long letter from him a week or so later, in which he told how happy and contented he felt, and that he had already made application for enlistment in a local troop of Boy Scouts.

“It was through the manly principles of the scouts that my salvation came about, you know, Walter,” he wrote, “and I’m bent on practicing them, in hopes that I may be able to repay the heavy debt I owe Hugh Hardin and all the rest of your splendid chums by passing the favor along. Perhaps, who knows, I may run across a boy who needs a friend and adviser, just like I did; and when I do, it’ll

make me happier than I can tell you to help him over the rocks.”

Hugh felt a mist come over his eyes when he read all that the boy put in that letter. He realized that, during the week of the County Fair, there had come, to a favored few of the scouts, an opportunity to perform a most charitable act.

When all the facts were made known at the next meeting of the troop, the story appealed strongly to those who had up to then been in complete ignorance of what had been going on in their midst. Hugh was also under the impression that it would do much good.

With the passing of the Fair week, the boys felt that they could hardly look forward to much more of consequence that fall. None of them suspected how circumstances would combine to bring several members of Oakvale Troop into the limelight once more ere the Thanksgiving holidays came around; but that is just what happened.

If you have enjoyed being in the company of Hugh and his comrades in these pages, and would like to learn what next engaged the attention of these wide-awake lads of Oakvale Troop, it will pay you to secure the volume that follows this, and which is published under the title of “The Boy Scouts as Forest Fire Fighters.”

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.
- Twice changed one name (Andy Wallace) to “Wallis” to be consistent with other places in this book (and other books in the series).
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in `_underscores_` (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)
- Included the printed page 158 as a blockquote: it actually comprises page 158 of another book in the series, “The Boy Scouts as Forest Fire Fighters”.
- Added (in brackets) a tentative reconstruction of the beginning of the sentence at the top of page 159.

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