



The
BOY SCOUTS
for
CITY IMPROVEMENT

SCOUT MASTER ROBERT SHALER

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THE BOY SCOUTS FOR CITY IMPROVEMENT

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," ETC., ETC.

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The Boy Scouts for City Improvement.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER THE SPREADING OAK.

“I guess old summer must have forgotten something and has come back to find it again, eh, Billy?”

“It feels more like the August dog-days than the tail end of September, that’s a fact, Hugh.”

“But right here, Billy, sitting on the stone curbing in the shade of the big General Putnam oak, we can cool off. Let’s rest up a bit and talk, while we watch the people go by.”

“That suits me all right, Hugh. I love to sit and watch others work on a hot afternoon. Suppose we chin a little about skating, tobogganing and all those nice pleasant things? They help to cool you off and make you feel that life is worth living, after all.”

The two lads were dressed in khaki uniforms, sufficient evidence that they were members of the local Boy Scout troop, of which their home town was rather proud. In fact, the young fellow who had been called Hugh and whose last name was Hardin, had lately succeeded in attaining the position of Assistant Scout Master, when the former incumbent resigned, owing to removal from the place.

His chum, Billy Worth, also a member of the Wolf Patrol, was a first-class scout, as his badge denoted. He was inclined to be rather stout in build, and his face expressed genial good nature. Billy and Hugh had been doing some shopping on the main street of their town and were sauntering along, when the heat of the September day caused them to make a halt under the grateful shade of the tremendous oak, which for some reason or other had been called after that staunch New England patriot of Revolutionary days, Israel Putnam.

While these two energetic lads will be readily recognized by any reader who has perused former books in this series, for the benefit of those who may be meeting them for the first time it might be advisable to say something concerning them and the local organization.

The troop now consisted of four full patrols of eight members each, and another was forming. These were, first of all, the Wolf, to which both boys belonged, Hugh being the leader; the Hawks, with Walter Osborne at their head; the Otters, once again having Alec Sands, Hugh's old-time rival, as their leader; and last of all, the Fox Patrol, in which Don Miller occupied the place of honor.

For several seasons now these scouts had been having the time of their lives under the charge of a retired army officer named Lieutenant Denmead, who, having more or less spare time on his hands and being deeply interested in the upbuilding of boy character, had long ago accepted the office of Scout Master to the troop.

They had camped many times, usually up at Pioneer Lake among the rugged hills close to old Stormberg Mountain. Besides this experience, they had had chances to see considerable of life in other places, as will be found detailed in previous volumes of this series.

On one occasion they had been given an opportunity to accompany the State Militia on their annual training trip, when a mock battle was fought. Some of the scouts, serving as a signal corps, proved themselves of considerable value to the armies engaged in the sham fight.

Then again, a favored few had been given a chance to see how the life savers of the Florida coast conduct their work during the stormy season of the year, and had even assisted in the work of rescue.

On another occasion they had accompanied the Naval Reserve Corps aboard a war vessel that had been placed at their disposal by the authorities at Washington, and in this manner had learned many valuable lessons that were bound to be profitable to them in the future.

The summer vacation of the present year had come to an end some little time before, and these lads were once more in school harness. Some of them may have been really glad to get back to work again, as the long weeks of idleness began to pall upon them; but these were few in number.

Times were different these days, since the scout movement had captured the town. So many delightful excursions were being planned for those who had the good fortune to belong to the troop that they could hardly find time to attend to all of their engagements. You never found these scouts lounging around through the August days with an aimless look on their faces. They were planning and executing right along, always full of business.

While Hugh and his chum lay there under the big oak and cooled off, a sudden gust of wind came sweeping along the street, causing the dust to rise.

“Whee! Look at the old scraps of paper and stuff flying through the air!” exclaimed Billy, laughing at the flurry the puff of wind had created. “Honest Injun, I do believe what some of the visitors at the hotel say: that we have the dirtiest little city of its size in the whole state! It doesn’t seem as though anybody cared a rap what goes on here. In nearly every street you’ll find paper blowing into fence corners, and all sorts of rubbish lying around. I sometimes blush for my town when anybody visits at our house from other places where the mayor is wide-awake and does things.”

“You know that the women tried to take it in hand a year ago. They’ve got a club called the Town Improvement Association, and for a little while they really did make a dent in things. Those tall cans with the letters ‘T. I. A.’ on them were bought and placed everywhere about. But does anybody bother putting papers and trash in them? Well, hardly ever. Watch that farmer coming along, and you’ll see just the sort of spirit that seems to have gripped the whole place by the throat. Everybody’s doing it, they say, and so they follow suit.”

Evidently the man in the farm wagon had brought a lot of tomatoes to market for which he had been unable to find a purchaser at any price. Perhaps they were not fresh, and as he was now going home and had no desire to burden his horses with an unnecessary load, he began deliberately to turn the crates over and allow the contents to trail in the road after him, doubtless expecting that the Italian children would immediately get busy and pick them up.

There was something like a rush and scramble for the spoils, but when the dust had settled again it could be seen that quite a number of the tomatoes had been crushed underfoot or refused as unworthy. At any rate, there they lay by dozens, only adding to the untidy condition of this, one of the streets leading into the main thoroughfare of the town.

The two scouts exchanged looks.

“That’s the way it keeps on going,” remarked Hugh with a shrug of his shoulders. “You see, we have quite an Italian population now, and somehow those people never seem to know the first thing about keeping things tidy. Perhaps they’ve had no one to show them. I sometimes think that the scouts will have to get busy and see what they can do about it.”

“Say, that’s a great scheme, Hugh!” exclaimed Billy, sitting up suddenly as if he had received a shock from a battery. “We’ve done a good many things that called for praise from the citizens of our home city; perhaps we might be able to set this thing working. Take the matter up, seriously, won’t you, Hugh? Propose something along that line to the boys at the meeting to-night. As sure as you live, I believe they’d jump at it like wildfire. And say, maybe the women folks would back us up if we started in to clean the town. Do you really think it could be done, Hugh?”

“If we had a fair show, I believe we could manage it,” replied the other thoughtfully; “but it’s sure to set people talking. I know a gang of boys who’d make all manner of fun to see the scouts acting as scavengers, picking up paper, asking people not to throw things around, and trying to start a ‘clean-up week’ here like they have in lots of places.”

“Hugh, when you speak of boys acting that way, I guess you don’t mean any scouts, do you,—Alec Sands, for instance, who used to oppose nearly everything you started?” Billy questioned.

“Oh! Alec is a good friend of mine these days,” replied the other; “and I hardly believe we’ll ever go back to the old conditions again. I was thinking of the one boy in town who seems to scorn the scouts and say all sorts of mean things about us,—Lige Corbley, you know.”

“Oh! you’re right about him! He is the worst boy in town this summer,” said Billy, shaking his head. “I never can understand that fellow. He’s as smart as they make ’em, only he has a bitter tongue in his head, as if he was born with a grouch against everybody that tries to be decent. Yet I’ve seen him carrying that little crippled brother of his across the muddy street, and say, it couldn’t have been done more tenderly if it had been you! Yet he’d as soon fight as eat his supper. And so you kind of think Lige would give us a heap of trouble, do you, if

ever we started to clean up the town?”

“Well,” Hugh replied, “he has a few boys about as bad as himself trailing after him in a sort of gang, and I expect they’d try all they could to upset our work for us. But if we have the women of the place and public sentiment back of us, we might be able to make a decent showing. I’d want to consider our chances well before making a start. Scouts don’t like to be looked down on as failures. Once they put their shoulders to the wheel, they want to see things move.”

“If only we had a mayor with any sort of backbone, things could never be done like that clodhopper of a farmer dumping his waste tomatoes out of the tail of his wagon along the road! Well, I should say not! I sometimes wonder if it would make any sort of change if the women did get a vote here and we had a woman for mayor!”

At that mental picture, Hugh laughed loud and long.

“Honest, I’d like to see the day that happens,” he remarked seriously. “Things couldn’t be any worse, and chances are they’d improve a thousand per cent. Men get so shiftless. Any old thing does for them, rather than have a lot of trouble. They think they get enough of that during spring cleaning or moving time.”

“But you’ll bring the matter up before the boys to-night, won’t you, Hugh?” Billy insisted. “Because Lieutenant Denmead is down to Boston, won’t make any difference. We can undertake the work by ourselves without consulting anybody. And once we concluded to make the dust fly, you could partition the whole town off between the different patrols, and offer a prize to the one that showed the cleanest streets and yards two weeks later. How’s that for an idea, Hugh?”

“It sounds good to me, Billy, and to tell you the truth, I’m thinking more and more about going into the scheme, as we get to talking about it. I know my folks would be glad to see the place look halfway decent. If public sentiment can only be waked up, the thing is as good as done in spite of Lige and his gang.”

Billy was all animation now. The heat of the afternoon seemed to have passed entirely out of his mind. As was always the case when he went into any scheme, Billy was ready to throw himself heart and soul into the fray.

He was just about to say something further along the line of their interesting

conversation, when a sudden wild racket arose, in which the yelping of a dog vied with loud laughter and hoots from around the corner.

Hugh and his fellow scout scrambled to their feet, wondering what was coming, possibly with half formed visions of a mad dog scare in their minds.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

They were not long in discovering the cause of all that commotion. A yellow dog of no particular breed but of the kind generally denominated "cur," came tearing around the corner of the street. He had an old rusty tin pan tied to his tail, and as this struck him at every jump, he was yelping like mad and trying every way possible to outrun the strange thing that rattled and banged at his heels.

People thrust their heads out of windows and doors. Most of them smiled or laughed outright at the spectacle. It was a time-honored custom, and naturally all stray curs must expect to be treated this way on occasion, to make a holiday for thoughtless boys.

Around the corner several half-grown lads came into view, evidently those who had been the cause of the wretched dog's dilemma. They were apparently enjoying the sight of the poor creature's fright and antics about as much as was possible. Several of them nearly doubled up with the excess of their hilarity.

There is an old fable about what great fun boys have stoning frogs, but as a moral it is hinted that what is "sport to them is death to the frogs."

In this instance, the wretched cur, thinking that his escape was cut off by the appearance of the two boys just in front of him, ran into a fence corner and began to lick his wounds.

Billy Worth had a big heart. He was always ready to take the part of the oppressed, whether it chanced to be a weak boy being set upon by a bully or a miserable dog abused by its tormentors. So he immediately advanced toward the fence corner, followed by Hugh, who was anxious to see what his tender-hearted chum meant to do.

Billy snapped his fingers and spoke gently as he advanced. The boys near the corner hooted derisively, and then watched, half expecting that Billy might be only intending to get within striking distance and then to throw off the mask and give the wretched dog a sudden kick in order to start him running afresh.

The dog himself possibly doubted the sincerity of the approaching lad. He had received little save kicks from human kind in times past, and must have come to look with more or less suspicion on such apparently friendly overtures that might only hide further ill-treatment.

The poor little beast raised a pair of brown eyes beseechingly toward Billy. He even vainly tried to wag his tail, though this proved to be a physical impossibility so long as a piece of cord kept the tin pan hitched in place.

Billy had his hand extended. The yellow cur winced as he felt a touch on his head, and then proceeded to lick Billy's hand. This act quite completed the conquest of the boy's heart.

"You poor little runt," said Billy tenderly, as he continued to stroke the badgered beast's quivering head, "it's a shame the way they've chased you just because you're nobody's dog. I've got a good mind to adopt you right now. Look at his face, Hugh, and tell me if you ever saw a more intelligent one? And his eyes are soft and brim full of friendliness. Yes, I'll do it! We lost our dog last month, and an empty kennel is something I don't like to see around."

As he spoke Billy took out his knife. The dog possibly feared that some new torture was in store for him, because he continued to lick Billy's hand, as though hoping in that mute fashion to plead with the boy not to hurt him.

One slash of the sharp blade severed the torturing rope and the tin pan fell away. Immediately the dog started to jump about joyfully, evidently trying to prove how grateful he felt. He did not attempt to run away, and when Billy held out his hand and spoke to him, he acted as though fairly wild with delight.

"Say, do you really believe the little critter ever had a kind word said to him before," Billy asked, as he kept on patting the head of the yellow cur. "Just remember that you're *my* doggie now. You want to trail along close to my heels till we get home, when I'll find a good bone for you, all right. And I'd like to see anybody try to abuse you after this, that's what."

He even took the little beast up in his arms, and the next thing he knew it was trying to lick his face to show its gratitude.

From the boys around the corner a series of loud jeers broke forth. They even began to throw stones and such things toward the two scouts, as though resenting this interference with their “fun.”

Billy, although a scout, could get angry at times, and he was apt to forget some of the rules to which he had agreed to conform at the time he joined the patrol.

“For two cents,” he said angrily, when a stone bounded up and struck him on the shin, “I’d be willing to go back there and offer to lick the coward who threw that rock.”

“I don’t believe that would mend matters any,” Hugh remarked, as he picked up the rusty old tin pan and tossed it carefully into one of the scrap cans that happened to stand close by. “There are three of them there besides Lige, and we’d only get into a fuss that might reflect on the scouts. We’re in uniform, remember. Let it pass; you can afford to. The dog thanks you anyhow; just see him frisk about as though he might be trying to jump out of his skin with gratitude for a kind act and a pleasant word. It would be hard to chase him away from you now, Billy. What’ll you call him—Bruno, as your other dog was named?”

“Well, that would hardly do for such a shrimp. Frisk sounds better to me. Hey, how do you like that for a name, eh, Frisk?” And he snapped his fingers at the little animal that was leaping at his side and barking joyously, something perhaps that he had seldom dared to do for fear of attracting attention and having a brick shied at him for his temerity.

“Looks to me as if any name would answer with him, if only there was a square meal tagged on at the end of it,” laughed Hugh. “His sides seem to be caving in. I guess he hasn’t found very fat pickings lately in skirmishing around town, though you’d think differently from the trash that’s lying everywhere.”

“Here’s our butcher’s place, so wait for me a minute while I beg some scraps of meat for my new dog. I’d like to let him know he’s met a real friend at last. Look at his eyes, will you, Hugh? Did you ever see such an appealing pair in any common dog? I’m glad I ran across Frisk, for I’m going to like him first rate.”

“The affection is mutual, then,” said Hugh, as Billy darted past the screen door of the butcher shop, and the cur, as though divining what was in the wind, sniffed at the barrier, whimpered, and wagged his tail expectantly while waiting for his new master to appear again.

When Billy came forth he had a paper in his hand, from which he took some scraps of meat and held them for the dog to jump after. It was comical to see the antics of the little animal. He tried to wag his tail so furiously between leaps that it almost seemed as though he must shake it off.

“Did you notice how most of the men who watched the circus when that tin pan was rattling and the dog yelping like a crazy thing, only laughed as if they thought it a good joke?” Hugh asked, as they walked along the street heading for the home of Billy.

“Yes, and I guess that’s about the way it used to be when they were boys,” replied the other reflectively. “They didn’t have the scouts in those days to show boys how to have oceans of good times without being mean and cruel. Times have changed some, I reckon, Hugh, since our fathers were young. That’s what my dad declares when he hears of something we’ve been and done. And say, I rather think he believes boys have got a better chance to do things to-day than they used to.”

“But did you see a single woman or girl laughing?” continued Hugh. “Every one I noticed seemed to be shocked and pained, and I heard several crying ‘Shame,’—just as though that would make any difference with such boys as Lige Corbley and his gang!”

“Well, now that you mention it, I did notice Susie Collins and Mazie Tucker talking to that bunch of sneaks near the corner, and I guess they must have been telling ’em what a low opinion they had of boys that could treat a poor dog as they were doing. Girls aren’t ever up to the same tricks as boys, and they don’t like the same things. They don’t see any fun in going fishing or hunting. And I reckon it’s as it should be, because we don’t like lots of things they dote on. The men thought it was a good joke. Not a single one but the minister called out, ‘Shame,’ did they, Hugh?”

“Not that you could notice,” Hugh answered. “And if you stop to think about it, Billy, perhaps we would have laughed, too, if this had happened before we

joined the scouts. Things look different to a boy after he has had his eyes opened, in a good many ways.”

“Now that’s where you hit me hard, Hugh,” admitted the other, reddening. “I can look back to more than one time when I helped tie a tin can to a dog’s tail and then started him scooting through the streets like a comet by shying stones after him. But never again, and you hear me say it! After looking into the eyes of little Frisk here, I feel ashamed to remember some things I’ve been guilty of doing in the past. I only hope that bunch of boys will come to their senses some fine day, too. They don’t know what they’re missing, that’s all.”

Hugh looked thoughtful.

“I only wish we could think up some way to get Lige interested in scout business, but he makes all manner of fun of us now and never lets a chance slip past to shout after a boy he sees dressed in khaki. There have been three fights already on that account, and I’ve had to warn all the fellows to keep on their guard so as to give him as little cause for blustering as possible. Of course when they’re actually set on and attacked, they’ve got to defend themselves. If this thing keeps up much longer, Lieutenant Denmead promised to see the mayor himself and enter a formal complaint, telling him that it has to be stopped if it takes all the police force in town to tame the Corbley gang.”

“When you get that fellow to change his ways, the sky will tumble on us,” declared the doubting Billy. “If there ever was a bad egg, it’s Lige. Hardly ten minutes have gone since they started this poor stray dog with that can at his heels, and, Hugh, chances are they’re up to some other slick game already. Oh! say, wouldn’t it be a cracking good thing for the town if ever Lige *did* reform and join the scouts! But that’s a dream, Hugh. Don’t ever believe it’s going to happen. I wouldn’t like to say that it’s impossible, but there’s a dozen chances to one against you and me ever seeing Lige in a khaki uniform, swearing to obey the rules and regulations that a scout has got to subscribe to when he enlists in the troop.”

They were now at Billy’s home.

“Wonder if I ought to tie Frisk to the kennel?” the yellow dog’s new master was saying as Hugh started away.

“No use,” laughed the other. “Why, you couldn’t drive that dog away from here

after you've put the rest of that meat by his kennel. He'll make himself at home and stay around for keeps. Look at him jumping, Billy! I really believe he knows what we're talking about. See him go into the kennel, sniffing around as if he just understood it was going to belong to him, big as it is! He's a fixture here from now on, let me tell you. So-long, Billy. See you at the meeting to-night, sure?"

"I should say yes, Hugh," came the quick reply. "I just seem to feel that there are going to be big things happening in this little city of ours before many days, and that the scouts are going to have a hand in the pie. I'll call up a lot of the boys on the 'phone and tell them to be on deck, because you've got a scheme to offer that's bound to make the old town sit up and take notice. That'll get them wild to hear what it is, and we'll have a full house."

"And I'm going to think it all over and then see what some of the ladies have to say about our taking the job on our hands; but I'll be able to tell you more about it to-night, so good-bye till then." And Hugh went off with his customary snappy stride.

CHAPTER III. THE FIRE CALL.

“Hello, there, Hugh! Where away in such a rush?”

It was some two hours later, when the assistant scout master, mounted on his bicycle and spinning along the road, heard a voice hail him after this manner. As he slowed up, another boy, a bright-faced, wide-awake fellow of about his own age, came speeding out of a side road and drew alongside.

This was no other than Alec Sands, who had for a long time past been Hugh’s most zealous rival and the cause of many tempestuous scenes in the troop. All this was changed now, and the boys seemed to have become very good friends. As to how this came about, certain incidents recorded in previous stories of the series would doubtless explain to the reader.

“Why, I’m bound on an errand out to Farmer Doolittle’s place,” said Hugh; “and if you haven’t anything better to take up your time, I’ll invite you to go along, Alec. I’ve hit on a scheme that I’m expecting to propose to the boys at the meeting to-night, and I’d like to have your opinion about it.”

“I’ll be only too glad to give you that, if it’s worth anything,” replied Alec; “but before you say a single word, I want to tell you that I’m in favor of anything you hatch up. I never knew a fellow who could plan like you do, Hugh. If I have to play second fiddle to anybody, I’m glad it’s you. Now hit up the pace and tell me what you’ve got on deck.”

Accordingly, Hugh explained in as few words as possible. As we are already well acquainted with the whole proposition, it will be quite unnecessary for us to go into details again. Hugh started with the talk that he and Billy had had while resting in the welcome shade of the big oak, and then described the wild commotion that accompanied the appearance of the wretched cur with that

unwieldy tin pan fastened to its poor tail.

“I’m glad Billy adopted the little kiwi,” declared Alec, as the story was concluded; “but about this scheme for cleaning up the town, I’m wondering whether it can be done.”

“Why not?” demanded Hugh, anxious to ascertain whether the same difficulties would occur to Alec that he had mentioned to the other comrade.

“Oh! well, lots of things would bother us like as not,” answered Alec. “First place, perhaps the mayor and the city council mightn’t exactly like to see it done. It would sort of put them to shame, you know, because their consciences must convince them that they haven’t been faithful to their duties.”

“Yes, I’ve thought of that,” Hugh remarked, “but if the women backed us up, ditto the fathers of the scouts and some more business men, the mayor and council wouldn’t say anything. They couldn’t stop us doing it, anyhow, because there’s no law against a boy picking up waste paper and chucking it into one of those tall cans on the corners. First of all, we’d paint the cans a bright red so as to attract attention. Then we might put the letters ‘T. I. A.’ on again, and underneath something to read like ‘I Eat Trash!’ That would take with a lot of people, I think.”

“Sounds good to me the more you tell about it, Hugh; and no matter what sort of trouble we meet, you can count on my standing back of you to the end. If the scouts can’t clean up the town and help make it look like a place people will be proud to claim as home, then it’s a hopeless case, that’s all I’ve got to say about it.”

“When nearly two score lively scouts get busy, there’s going to be something doing, believe me,” commented Hugh, who had seen the troop in action many times in the past and hence knew what the various patrols were capable of accomplishing. “And I’m glad to know that you take so kindly to my scheme in the start. It’s going to pull stronger the more you think it over. Billy’s telling all the boys over the ’phone to bring bags along with them to-night. You see he believes in rushing things. And so I’m figuring on commencing operations right away, if a majority are in favor of tackling the big job.”

“I’ll fetch a broom and you can bring a shovel; whatever we start to do, we may need something like that, Hugh,” observed the practical Alec, becoming, just as

the other had expected, more interested in the scheme the further he went.

“Listen! Wasn’t that a shout just then?” exclaimed Hugh, turning his head as he slackened his pace by means of the pedal brake.

“Seemed to come from over in that clump of trees, too,” observed Alec, almost immediately adding: “Look at all that smoke rising up, Hugh! I honestly believe a house or barn must be on fire.”

“Come on, let’s head that way,” said Hugh quickly. “Here’s a road to get in, and it must lead straight there.” While saying this, he threw himself off his wheel to open a gate that stood in their way.

Together the two scouts pedaled along the wagon road that led from the main highway toward the clump of trees, back of which doubtless lay the house and barn connected with the farm.

“It’s the Ketchem place,” said Alec. “You know the family is related to that good-for-nothing Lige Corbley you were just talking about. Queer how things happen, isn’t it? You never speak of an angel but you hear the quiver of wings; though I reckon Lige is far from being that kind of a fellow. Hugh, it is a house afire! Hurry, and let’s help put the blaze out. There are only a widow and her three children living here. She runs the farm since her husband died last year.”

Both boys strained themselves to the utmost to reach the scene of the excitement as speedily as possible. They could see a woman carrying two buckets of water, and several children running back and forth, while the smoke continued to ooze from the doors and windows of the farmhouse.

“But that was a man who shouted for us to come,” declared Alec. “Do you see him anywhere around, Hugh?”

“Somebody’s up on the roof with a bucket of water,” replied the other scout. “He has a ladder placed against the side of the house. Well, would you believe it, Alec, it must be the very boy we were talking about? I saw him look this way when he waved his hand just then, and it was surely Lige Corbley.”

“Well, for once, then, we’ll have to give him a helping hand. This isn’t a time to stand back for fear of getting contaminated. Come on, Hugh, let’s find some buckets. We’ve just got to get this fire under control!”

Letting their wheels lie where they had dropped, the boys hurried forward to the place where the almost distracted widow was standing. Hugh took the empty buckets from her hand, and Alec, spying several tin milk pails sunning on a picket fence near by, hastened to help himself to a couple.

“To the well, and fill up!” he shouted, at the same time dashing off at full speed.

The boy on the roof came down hastily, as though he realized that this additional force might mean another method of attacking the fire.

“It’s in the kitchen,” he said. “I poured three buckets down around the chimney because I reckoned it must have caught from a defective flue. But a lot of rags and things are blazing inside and making all this smoke now. Bring on the water, boys, and we’ll knock the stuffing out of the old fire. Whoop!”

All of them were kept very busy for some ten minutes. The fire had managed to get such a good start that it was only with difficulty subdued; but as bucket after bucket of water from the well was poured around the kitchen, by degrees it lost its grip; and in the end there was not a live spark to be found.

“That settles it!” exclaimed Alec, almost out of breath with his recent exertions.

The widow was shaking Hugh’s hand and thanking him with tears in her eyes for the part he had taken in the saving of her home. Then she came over to Alec and repeated her words of gratitude. The children only laughed, as though they thought it more or less of a show gotten up for their especial benefit, for they were too young to realize the horrors of fire.

Hugh glanced out of the tail of his eye toward the stout boy who had enjoyed of late the unenviable reputation of being the terror of the town. He wondered what Lige Corbley thought of scouts now, after seeing that they could meet an emergency like this without hesitation.

He could see that the other was hesitating, as though urged on to say something, and yet finding it difficult to express his feelings. Finally, however, Lige walked forward and looked at Hugh in a peculiar way.

“Huh!” he grunted. “I never thought I’d see the day when I had to thank one o’ you scouts for lendin’ a helpin’ hand! But you’ve saved my aunt’s place, and you did pretty well, if I do say it. P’raps after all there may be two halfway decent

fellers in your crowd. 'Pears like you mightn't *all* be a set of sissies and cowards!"

That was a strange sort of compliment, Alec thought, and he immediately turned his back on the sneering speaker, as though wishing to let him understand that he meant to have nothing to do with a fellow of his stamp.

As for Hugh, he was better able to understand what the real feelings of the rough boy might be. He believed that Lige was secretly forced to respect them after what he had seen, and in saying what he did, he had intended to compliment them. It was pretty hard for him to utter anything that might sound like praise for the scouts, whom he had long derided as milk-and-water boys, following a leader as a flock of sheep follow the bellwether.

Hugh must have thought that Lige had a strange idea of what constituted a coward. According to some people, it would mean any boy mean enough to torment a helpless animal or to pick upon a lad smaller than himself.

"Oh, that's nothing, Lige," Hugh remarked lightly, as he turned away. "We were glad to be on hand to help out, though I guess you'd have smothered the fire yourself, even if we hadn't happened along."

"I don't know 'bout that," muttered Lige, frowning. "When I tackled her one place, she got boomin' again in another; and I didn't know how on earth I was goin' to manage. Anyhow, my aunt, she's obliged to both of you fellers. So-long!"

As he and Alec rode along the road again, after washing the smut from their faces at the well, Hugh found himself wondering whether this little incident might have any bearing on a change of heart on the part of Lige Corbley. He knew what a consistent hater the other could be, and how deep-rooted, though unreasonable, his detestation of the Boy Scouts was.

"I'm afraid it will take a lot more than that to make him alter his mind about scouts," he said. And Alec, quick to understand what must be passing through his mind, was not at all slow to remark:

"Yes, that's what I think, too, Hugh. He's been nursing this feeling for the lot of us so long that he actually believes he is right, and that we're a silly bunch. What he said was forced out of him unwillingly, I could see. He kept watching you out

of the corner of his eye, as though he couldn't just make you out. Nothing will come of the little affair. We've had an adventure, and there's some satisfaction in knowing we had a chance to do a good deed. Somehow I haven't turned my badge to-day, and now I think I've got a good right to do it."

"I should say you had," laughed Hugh. "I make it a regular practice to find something to do for somebody right early in the morning, so as to get it off my mind. Though for that matter, there's no reason we shouldn't perform twenty kind acts during each day, and we will, too, if the thing has become real to us, and not just a meaningless service to carry out a set rule. But it's good to start right. It gets to be a sort of clock-work performance with you, once you fall into the rut. But let's talk now about what we mean to do to-night if the majority is in favor of it. I never felt more stirred up than I do right now; for this town needs purging if any city ever did, in more ways than one. Mark what I say, Alec, once we get started there will crop up all sorts of openings through which the place can be improved. If my plan takes with the boys of the troop to-night, the good people around will have something to talk about at breakfast time to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER IV. WILLING WORKERS.

Long before eight o'clock that night the boys had gathered at their meeting-place, which was now in the basement of one of the churches, where they were promised a new gymnasium for the coming winter season.

When the roll was called, just twenty-nine responded to their names, showing that whatever Billy had told them over the wire, it must have excited their curiosity considerably. There was a buzz of excitement all over the room when, the regular business finished, Hugh started to explain the plan of campaign that had appealed to Billy and himself that very afternoon.

He led up to it by telling about the terrible condition of the streets almost everywhere about town.

“It's become a chronic habit with everybody to sweep their waste into the street, so that everywhere you go you'll find stray papers blowing about and lying in all fence corners. Why, sometimes you'd think a city dump was close by, from the way old stuff flies in the wind. All that could be changed if we just made up our minds to take hold and assist the women of the town. The job they tackled twice has always been too much for them. Let's see what the scouts can do to help out. And as the majority rules in our meetings, I hope somebody will call for a rising vote.”

At that, Alec was before Billy in jumping to his feet and making the proposition that the troop take hold in earnest to put themselves in the running when it came to having a clean city, worth living in.

The motion was carried unanimously. If there were any “doubting Thomases” there who feared that the attempt might end in failure, they were carried off their feet by the wild enthusiasm that seemed to pervade the meeting, for every scout

registered his willingness to embark in the scheme, no matter what it called for.

A little discussion was next in order. Hugh believed in taking the bull by the horns, and hence he told the others what he feared might be their most difficult task: keeping the Corbley crowd from undoing all their work spitefully, just to show that Boy Scouts could not run that town.

“We’ll not cross a bridge until we come to it, though,” said Hugh in conclusion, “and now, what’s to hinder our getting in some fine work for a starter to-night?”

“Hurrah!” cried a number of the interested scouts in a volley.

“It happens that the moon is almost full for the occasion,” said Bud Morgan, one of the Wolves and a boy who could always be depended upon to do his share in everything that came along; Bud had seen considerable practical experience in the field, as he had once been on a Western ranch and had also worked through a vacation season with a surveying party.

“But what can we do in such a rushing hurry, Mr. Scout Master?” asked Arthur Cameron, another of the same patrol, whose particular hobby was in the lines of photography and weather bureau work.

“For a starter, I thought we might take a turn around the little park and get it in apple-pie shape. People throw away greasy paper from luncheons there, and newspapers they’ve been reading. It’s a shame the way that pretty little square looks. My mother says she avoids passing across it whenever she can, because it seems so much like a pig-pen. Now, boys, what do you say, shall we set to work with a vim and make that a fit spot for any lady to sit or walk?”

“We can do it!” cried Blake Merton of the Hawks, a fellow who had a melodious voice and was called on many times by his chums when in camp to start up the songs they loved.

“Lead the way, Hugh,” proposed Walter Osborn. “We’ve taken to your scheme like ducks to water, and the sooner we get busy the better it’ll please a lot of us. I’m really getting rusty for want of something to do besides study, now school has begun. Fall in, everybody, and don’t forget your bags.”

“Now we know why Billy told us to fetch these bags along,” remarked Sam Winter. “We are to stuff the waste paper in them, so we can carry it to some

central place. Is that the idea, Hugh?”

“Yes. We’ll put several of the collecting cans in a bunch near the middle of the little park, and in the morning the dump man can take the trash away,” the scout master informed him.

“Too bad we couldn’t make a big bonfire and burn it all up,” grumbled Billy. “I’d feel better if that ended the affair, because—Oh, well, if the rest of you think it will be all right to leave it there, I’m not going to kick. How many of you fetched a broom along?”

It was found that, all told, there were seven brooms in the party, eight hoes, half a dozen shovels, and two rakes. When this curious assortment of implements had been shouldered by the enthusiastic boys, they looked like a corps of gardeners about to begin work on some public ground.

Two by two the scouts marched out of their meeting-room and headed for the open plaza not far away, where the grass was green and many bushes and flowers grew. The spot had really lost much of its beauty through the habit most people had formed of throwing aside all sorts of rubbish. In certain quarters of town it was not an unusual sight to see, perhaps, an old coal scuttle, cast-off shoes, or even a rusty hot-water boiler reposing in the gutter as though that were the ordinary place for such derelicts.

As the scouts crossed the main street in order to reach the little park, some people stood and stared. A few gave them a faint cheer, though unable to understand what the parade could be for. Doubtless they imagined that it might only be a prank on the part of the boys, since they carried garden tools and brooms in place of guns.

When they reached the small park, Hugh began to give his orders. He knew every foot of that ground and had already planned the attack in his mind.

Dividing it into four equal parts, he assigned one to each of the three patrols besides his own. After that, it was up to the leaders to see that their workers did their part in the undertaking.

First of all, several of the tall waste paper cans, which nobody ever thought of using any more, were deposited near the center of the open space. There was one for each patrol, and immediately the scouts busied themselves in collecting the

worst of the accumulated trash, depositing it in the receptacles where it should have lodged long since.

Presently the hoes, rakes and brooms began to get busy. Such a bustling spectacle had certainly not been seen in that vicinity for many a year as the industrious band presented when they started to cover every foot of ground in the little city park.

Of course all this could not go on without a certain number of people becoming wise to the fact that an innovation had begun. Small boys and girls who really should have been at home and in bed, but from lack of a curfew bell still played upon the streets shouting and chasing each other, watched what the scouts were doing, and upon discovering that they were actually *working*, ran to tell others that a wave of reform had struck the town at last.

It was not long before fully fifty people stood around and watched the progress of the scouts' work, commenting on the novelty. Some made great fun of the idea that mere boys could cause the city to take on a different look. They declared that it was bred in the bone with the Italians and other foreigners to be careless, and it could not be beaten out of the flesh.

Others were more sanguine. These scouts had succeeded in a number of things where others had made failures, and besides, in this case they surely were animated by the right principles. So a few observers said good words and cheered the boys on. Several of the women were loud in their expressions of gratification, and promised that they would see to it that the almost defunct society for town improvement took on new life and backed up the boy element in their work.

It was more or less fun for Hugh and his comrades, too. Boys can put in a lot of hard work and call it a frolic. They laughed and joked as they swept and raked and gathered up armfuls of rubbish to fill the tall cans. In the end there had to be a detachment sent out skirmishing for several more receptacles, such was the vast amount of trash collected on that first night of the fray against dirt.

When ten o'clock sounded from the church tower where the clock stood, the round moon looked down on as neat a little park as one could well imagine. Every foot of it had been carefully scraped and cleaned by that enterprising band of workers, until it was what might be called immaculate.

By that time it was a pretty tired lot of scouts who began to gather around the one in command. The fun of the thing had vanished, and they were almost as eager to be given the word to start toward home and clean themselves up, as a while before they had seemed to begin operations.

“It’s all done, anyhow,” Alec Sands said, as he came up to report that his squad had completed their share of the work. “I’m going to come down here the first thing in the morning, just to listen and hear what folks say when they find out what’s happened. Chances are they’ll rub their eyes and wonder if the little darky twins we see advertised as willing workers haven’t been on the job while people slept.”

Hugh laughed as he glanced around at the perspiring scouts.

“And if they could see some of the faces here on this festive occasion,” he remarked humorously, “they’d feel dead certain of it, because we are the nearest approach to coons seen around here for many a day. I warrant it’s going to keep a few of us busy cleaning up our uniforms against the next parade. They don’t look as spic and span as when we were in the procession on Labor Day.”

“But that ends it for to-night, doesn’t it, Hugh?” asked Alec anxiously, for he was very tired, having worked with his customary zeal,—and Alec had once been the spoiled son of a very wealthy man, too, until he joined the scouts and learned the many benefits that labor brings in its train.

“Yes, let’s all make for home now. I hope that when we drift down this way in the morning, we’ll be satisfied with our job,” Hugh replied.

The signal being given, the boys drew up in line with military precision, and at the command started away, still flourishing their brooms, hoes, rakes and shovels as though proud of their strange weapons for warfare.

Some of the men gave them a parting cheer. Even if they did not have a great deal of faith in the success of this new undertaking of the scouts, at least it did not prevent their admiring the unflinching spirit with which the boys had taken up arms against the tide of uncleanness that was engulfing the town.

There were a few “boos” also, coming doubtless from certain elements that viewed any movement looking to reform with disfavor, because it was likely to cause them to change their careless, easy-going ways. They might actually be

compelled to take three steps to deposit a newspaper wrapper in a receptacle, instead of throwing it on the ground as at present to blow where it listed.

When Hugh reached his home, he, too, felt the effects of his recent work, for he had not spared himself a particle in setting a good example to his fellows of the Wolf Patrol. And he believed that their section of the little park was just as destitute of rubbish as any other quarter.

Hugh was asleep soon after his head touched the pillow, and really he knew next to nothing until long after the sun had arisen. Having dressed, he was proceeding down to the dining room for breakfast, it being Saturday morning, when he heard the telephone bell ring.

“Hello! Hello! Who is it?” he asked, reaching the instrument. When he caught the well-known voice of Alec over the wire, Hugh had a sense of coming misfortune.

“Well, it’s all up the flue, Hugh!” said the other scout disconsolately.

“What do you mean?” demanded the assistant scout master.

“Only this,” the other continued sadly, and angrily as well. “I’m down-town now,—came early to gloat over our work,—but would you believe it, everything has been turned out of the trash cans and scattered all over the park again!”

CHAPTER V. REPAIRING DAMAGES.

“What’s that?” Hugh demanded hastily as though considerably aroused. “Say it over again, Alec, please.”

“All our hard work went for nothing, Hugh, because after we left, some miserable skunks,—and we can guess who they must have been,—kicked over the trash cans we’d filled and scattered the stuff all about the park.”

“That’s pretty rough on our boys,” said the assistant scout master, trying evidently to restrain his righteous anger and thinking more of his comrades than of himself.

“I should say it was a hard knock on you, most of all, and that’s what it was intended for,” Alec continued over the wire. “Some of that Corbley gang hate you just about as they say Old Satan hates holy water. They must have been watching us as we worked, and I bet you we weren’t halfway home before they started in to do the wrecking business! Say, what are we going to do about it, Hugh?”

“Do?” echoed the other instantly. “Why, there’s only one thing we can do, and that’s start in and clean the park up again! Scouts are made of stuff that doesn’t let little accidents like this upset them. Every time they’re knocked down, it’s only to get up again and sail in harder than ever. Scouts never say die as long as they can put one foot in front of another!”

“Bully for you, Hugh!” said Alec joyously. “Those are my sentiments to a dot; and I ought to have known that you’d talk that way. Tell me what to do to start the ball rolling, and you’ll find me Johnny-on-the-spot.”

“Get Billy on the wire, and tell him to pass the word along to the next one. We’ll

gather at the church, and every fellow fetch along whatever he had with him last night, broom, hoe, rake or shovel. This thing is going to be fought out to a finish, if it takes all winter!”

“Bully! I’m on. Shall I ring up Billy now?”

“Yes, go ahead full steam, while I get busy in another direction.”

Hugh swallowed a cup of coffee and took a few bites, but breakfast somehow did not seem to appeal very strongly to him on that morning. He certainly did not have his camp appetite along, nor was it to be wondered at, for the news that had come over the wire had been most discouraging.

The first thing he did after starting out was to call upon Mrs. Marsh, a lady who was at the head of the women connected with the Town Improvement Association.

Hugh knew her very well, and was also aware of the fact that she professed to be deeply interested in all that the scouts had been doing in the past. As briefly as possible he narrated all that had happened, and also stated that the scouts were determined to complete the job they had undertaken.

Now the president of the league for bettering the conditions of the town and its inhabitants had begun to despair of ever arousing public sentiment. Several times in the past she had labored to the utmost, only to see things go back again into the old wretched rut, as though the vast majority of the people did not care to be bothered and would rather go on as they had been living, letting shiftlessness have full control in a happy-go-lucky manner.

When this bright-faced scout told her in his manly way how he and his comrades had undertaken to carry on the work, and above all things wanted the co-operation of the good women of the league, the president awoke to the fact that at last the long-hoped-for opportunity had arrived, and in a most unexpected fashion.

“Most certainly you will have the backing of the league, financially as well as morally,” she hastened to tell Hugh. “I have dreamed of this day, but had begun to despair of ever seeing it. And to think that after all it should come through the young blood of the city! I will call a meeting of the association this very morning, Saturday or not. Let the men eat baker’s stuff for one Sunday, if by the

sacrifice so much can be done for our town. I promise you that a committee will call at once on the mayor, and get him to issue a proclamation warning everybody that from now on any one caught throwing waste upon the public streets will be immediately arrested and heavily fined. If we can get that issued, I will have copies printed in several languages and see that it is placed in the hands of all foreigners, as well as posted on the fences and bill boards. If we can co-operate with you in any other way, Hugh, come and see me without hesitation. You will have the best wishes of every mother in this town; and I really believe that this time something is going to come out of the venture.”

After this encouraging talk, Hugh felt a thousand per cent better. His spirits rose again, and it was with a smile on his face that he hurried over to where the meeting-place of the scouts was located.

He found that the boys were already gathering. They looked as angry as could be, and there was considerable muttering about retaliation, which, however, Hugh stopped at once.

“No use saying anything like that, fellows,” he told the hotheads. “What we’ve got to do is to repair damages at once, and then try to see if things can be kept as we put them. I’ve been to see Mrs. Marsh, who is at the head of the Improvement League, you know, and she’s promised to back us up all through. They will have an emergency meeting this morning and send a committee to the mayor.”

As the scouts were anxious to hear all the news, Hugh went on to tell what else the energetic lady had promised; and somehow this gave the boys such cheer that the angry looks vanished and presently they were laughing over the situation.

When the entire troop, so far as they could be reached, was on hand, Hugh made a little speech, and aroused their enthusiasm by his eloquence. After that they were ready to follow him in anything he chose to undertake.

“Fall in!” called the scout master, and the sound of the bugle caused every member of the troop to step lively.

Shortly afterward, the townspeople saw a strange procession marching through the main streets. They had often watched the Boy Scouts go forth to camp and march in parades, but never had most of them witnessed such a novel sight as when Hugh and his khaki-clad followers passed the stores, carrying such odd

weapons as brooms, rakes, hoes and shovels.

The news passed around like wild-fire.

“The scouts are going to clean up the town! They’re heading straight for the park! Watch the dirt fly when they take hold! They always get there when they start in!”

Presently the whole town was astir. Men, women and children gathered to see the novel sight of boy soldiers playing the part of street cleaners. The police awoke to the fact that it was their duty to protect the scouts from interference. This happened after the Chief had received several urgent messages from influential citizens, apprising him that they would hold him responsible for it if the boys were not allowed to carry on their self-imposed task unmolested. Since the city had so long shirked its plain duty, it could at least stand back of those brave lads who by their devotion meant to teach citizens a wholesome lesson.

Hugh was not at all dismayed now as he saw how their work of the previous night had been undone and the refuse scattered over the grass and walks of the pretty little park.

Once again he set his four patrols to work, each being given a section to take care of as on the previous occasion. The boys labored with vigor, while the police kept the crowds back as well as they could.

There were a lot of loud comments, quite naturally, but the main sentiment of the spectators seemed to be in favor of allowing the energetic scouts a chance to make good.

“If they can do it, they’ll shame the whole rotten town management!” one man loudly declared; and while it was recognized that he chanced to be the defeated candidate for mayor at the last election, his sentiments were heartily applauded.

Business men going to their offices took a turn out of their way to ascertain what was going on. Some of them seemed to be amused at the idea of a parcel of half-grown school-boys venturing to tackle what had apparently been too heavy a task for the good women of the town.

Some of these women also made their appearance and seemed to be visibly aroused over the newly-awakened hope of bettering conditions. They cheered

the boys on by pleasant words, and then hurried away to attend the call for a meeting at the residence of their president.

The city was on tiptoe with excitement. Boys even forgot for the time being that this was Saturday and that they had a ball game in prospect with a team from a nearby town. They hung around the park all the time the scouts were working, and a few even declared their intention of sending in their names as candidates for admission to the troop.

In the daytime it was possible to do even better work than under the conditions that prevailed when their first clean-up was undertaken. Consequently when all of the refuse had been gathered in the cans once more, Hugh, looking around, felt that no lady need blush to be seen walking or sitting in that little park, for it was spic and span clean.

Once caught napping was enough for Hugh, and he did not mean it should happen again if he could help it.

Leaving the rest of the scouts there, he went in search of the contractor whose business it was to collect the ashes and garbage of the town. This man happened to be a sensible sort of a fellow, who, upon hearing what had been done, promised to dispatch a couple of carts at once to the square in order to carry away the contents of the various receptacles. And when this had finally been attended to, Hugh breathed a sigh of relief. At least, the active Corbley crowd would not be able to scatter that trash about again, which was a comfort.

“What’s next on the program, Hugh?” the boys were asking.

It had always been a maxim with the assistant scout master to “strike while the iron is hot.” He knew that much could be accomplished while this new enthusiasm of his followers ran riot in their veins. Later on, the story would grow stale and they might need urging in order to carry on the work; but now every fellow seemed brim full of energy and a desire to pitch in.

“I’ve laid off the center of the town in quarters,” he told them, “and each patrol will have one of these to look after this morning. Gather all the waste paper you can find and put it in the receptacles. Barney Heath has promised to work double to-day, collecting and carrying off. By noon we’ll call it a day, and let’s see what a big change we can make in the looks of things by then. That’s all I’ve got to say to you, boys. Now get busy!”

They gave him a cheer that was taken up by the listening crowd. After that the scouts scattered, and it was a hustling, lively lot of boys who invaded the business section of the town. They gathered up the floating paper and crammed it into the big cans until the latter were overflowing. Then the wagons came along and took away what had been collected, so that the boys could keep up the fine work.

That was only a beginning. Already the spirit of “clean-up week” seemed to be in the air. Business men warned their clerks not to throw anything on the street on penalty of trouble; others actually went out of their way to drop envelopes from letters into a can, or else crumpled them up and thrust them into their pockets.

Great things spring from small beginnings; oaks have their start in the little acorns; and so from this determination on the part of the scouts to set the ball rolling looking to a cleaner town, much was to be expected.

When noon came and they stopped work for that day, a transformation seemed to have come already to the city. A stranger who had not seen the place for a month or two, upon dropping off the train was discovered rubbing his eyes and asking whether he had not made a mistake, because somehow things did not seem familiar!

CHAPTER VI. ON DUTY.

Hugh was perfectly satisfied with the progress made. He knew very well that the whole business could not be accomplished in a day. They must advance slowly but surely. What the scouts did was going to be only for the sake of arousing public sentiment, and after the community had taken hold in earnest, the thing so long waited for would be accomplished. The city would never consent to go back to the old, dirty conditions, after once experiencing the pleasure of seeing her streets and front yards clean. The wave of reform once started would roll on irresistibly, so that no citizen, however humble, would dare resist its influence.

Thinking that the boys had done enough for that one day, Hugh told them to spend the afternoon as they pleased, but to come to another meeting after supper that night.

He did this because he knew only too well that a certain element in the place would never rest satisfied to allow these uplifting practices to continue unmolested. And Hugh believed that they must "fight fire with fire," just as plainmen do when caught by the burning prairie grass.

Although most of the boys were free to attend the ball game or go where they felt inclined, Hugh and several others had work laid out for themselves during that September afternoon.

Paint and brushes were secured, and they started in to color all the waste paper cans a brilliant red. That would catch the eye from afar, and thus call attention to the fact that receptacles were provided for all trash, so that there need no longer be any excuse for throwing things around promiscuously.

Later on, as the occasion offered, they meant to place the lettering on the cans in white, and also the effective notice running: "I Eat Trash," which Hugh had

mentioned previously as an appropriate design.

While thus engaged, Hugh was approached by the Chief of Police, who had been more or less uneasy since this moral wave had developed in town. He hardly knew just where he stood in the matter, for the mayor had been known to be not in favor of “stirring things up,” so long as on the surface they did not look so very bad.

“What’s got into all of you boys?” he asked as he stood alongside Hugh and watched him putting a bright coat on the dingy waste paper can. “First there was last night when a bunch of you got busy here and made things fly, and then again this morning. I never saw the place worked up so much as it is now. My telephone bell has been ringing like mad all day, and I’ve heard from half the people in town. What they haven’t said to me about backing you scouts up in your new job you could put in a thimble. But strikes me I take my orders from the mayor, and up to now I haven’t heard a word from headquarters.”

“Perhaps you may right away, Chief,” said Hugh, who had glimpsed Mrs. Marsh approaching, her arms full of printed papers and her face bright with a beaming smile, as though the looks of things about town gave her great pleasure.

“I saw Mayor Strunk, Hugh, and he issued a proclamation which I’ve had rushed into print in English and Italian. Three men are busy pasting it around town, and a dozen women are seeing that it goes into every home. Perhaps you would like to have a copy, Chief, as it concerns your department, I imagine.”

When the head of the local police force had read the message of the mayor, calling upon all citizens to avoid littering the streets or their dooryards with anything in the shape of waste, and promising to let the heavy hand of the police drop on all offenders, his eyes opened very wide.

“I’ll take this over to the office and study it, if you don’t mind, Mrs. Marsh,” he remarked soberly. “But of course you understand that the police will be found ready to do whatever they are told by the mayor and the city council. If the *people* want a clean town, they can have it. That’s up to them.”

“But these fine boys have one favor to ask of you, Chief,” said the lady. “There is a certain element in the city that is bent on spoiling whatever work the scouts accomplish. Last night these unruly young ruffians came here after the scouts had worked hard to clean up the park, and scattered all the refuse around again,

and with police headquarters only a block away. I hope such a thing will not be permitted again. You must know that these bad boys are the ones that have become a menace to the good name of our town. They are called the Corbley crowd, because their recognized leader is Lige Corbley.”

The big Chief turned red in the face, and Hugh could give a pretty good guess why, since Andy Wallis, the right bower of Lige Corbley, happened to be a nephew of the policeman.

“We’ll all try to do our sworn duty, ma’am,” was all the big man said, as he turned and strode away, the manifesto clutched rigidly in his hand. It was evident that the Chief already saw the handwriting on the wall which was destined to bring more or less trouble his way.

Throughout pretty much that livelong afternoon, Hugh, Alec, Billy, and a few others went on with their self-imposed task. The red paint was so primed that it would dry quickly, so that there was little likelihood of their labor going for naught because of mischievous boys smearing it with sticks or dirt while still wet.

All over town those cans stood out prominently to remind the shiftless of their duties. That blazing color had been adopted because red is the recognised danger signal with all railroads and places where peril is apt to abound. It is also the color that angers the charging bull in the arena; and possibly those bright-hued receptacles would taunt Lige Corbley and his followers, so as to keep alive their spirit of destruction longer than might otherwise be the case.

Feeling as though they had had a pretty hard day, the painting squad finally completed their task and went home to clean up. They had reason to feel satisfied with what had been accomplished since early morning; and yet Hugh knew the end was not yet in sight. In fact, the fight had hardly more than begun.

They had a difficult task ahead of them to keep what they had won. If Lige Corbley and his crowd started to turn things upside down again, they must be taught a lesson not soon forgotten.

This was what worried Hugh most of all. He could not forget that blood ran thicker than water, and hence the Chief must naturally be influenced by the fact that a near relative of his was among the offenders. While he might appear to be very vigilant, there were lots of ways in which his force could shut their eyes to

what was going on. Hugh had talked this matter over with Mrs. Marsh after the Chief had left them, and she had assured him that the mayor was very much in earnest, promising that if the police did not perform their duties in a satisfactory manner he would see to it that there was an immediate change in their head.

It seemed as though the telephone were fated to play a very prominent part in all the doings of that day. It had carried scores upon scores of messages back and forth connected with the new movement for the cleaning up of the town, since Hugh himself first learned of the upheaval in the park over the wire. It came to pass that Hugh had just completed taking his bath, and, dressed in his newer suit of khaki, was taking it easy in the sitting-room while waiting for supper to be announced, when he was told that some one wanted to speak with him on the 'phone.

Thinking, of course, that it must be Billy or one of the other scouts, wishing information, perhaps, connected with their intention for that night's meeting, Hugh was somewhat surprised to hear an unfamiliar voice address him.

"Is this Hugh Hardin?"

"It is," he at once replied.

"Well, never mind asking who's talking to you, because I don't mean to give my name," continued the other hastily. "I'm a boy, and one you know. I'm not a member of the scouts, though I hope to be one of these days. Now, I wanted to warn you that I'm afraid you're in for a heap of trouble, perhaps to-night, about this thing of cleaning up the town. How do I know? Well, I'm only giving a guess, but chances are it's a good one. I saw Lige Corbley talking like everything to a bunch of his kind. There were several fellows on deck that don't generally train with him; but they acted like they'd joined forces. All I heard was something to the effect that they'd 'show him what they thought of his silly old proclamation.' I reckoned that might mean the mayor, so p'raps they've got it in for him good and hard. That's all I know, and I don't want to hold the wire any longer. You needn't try to find out who I am, because I don't want to be thanked, and by the same token I don't mean to take any chances of those fellows learning who gave their game away. So-long, Hugh!"

Hugh looked thoughtful after receiving this friendly warning. He was not very much surprised, truth to tell, and had rather expected that conditions would bring

the Corbley crowd to the front again.

It did not matter much who the boy might be from whom the warning had come. Evidently he had considered it his duty to put the assistant scout master of the troop on his guard, and at the same time, knowing Lige Corbley well, to keep his own name out of the matter for fear of unpleasant consequences.

Not feeling full confidence in the police to patrol the town and prevent vandalism, Hugh realized that the scouts were going to have their hands full in trying to keep that which they had won through hard labor.

Of course the home folks were full of the subject at the supper table, and so Hugh had to relate all that had happened.

“I’ve been receiving ever so many messages from the women connected with the Improvement League all of to-day,” Mrs. Hardin remarked with a glance full of motherly pride toward Hugh, “and they agree that the time is ripe to settle this important question once and for all. We will have a better and cleaner city after the scouts have done their work. It will be a far healthier place in which to live and rear a family. And whatever you and your comrades do, my son, be sure that you have the backing of those to whom you are dear. We feel every confidence in the ability of the troop to master this problem, as you have others in the past.”

Of course Hugh understood that he would have the sympathy of those at home when he first started into this thing, but all the same it made his pulses thrill to hear such encouraging words.

As soon as supper was over, he started for the place of meeting. There was much to be discussed before they settled on their plan for the night; and every scout on duty must know just how far he would be allowed to go in trying to keep the unruly elements in check.

The mayor had given them permission to serve as aids to the police in the effort to keep the peace, but this only meant that they could patrol as much as they pleased. They must call upon the guardians of the town in case they made any important discovery.

Hugh did not altogether fancy such an arrangement, and he meant to put it up to his followers to decide whether they should carry it out or settle on some plan of their own, looking to teach the Corbley crowd a much needed lesson should any

of them be taken in the act.

There was not a single fellow missing when the meeting was called that night except two who were known to be sick, another whose mother did not wish him to be out nights, and a fourth scout who happened to be out of town with his folks.

Tired though the boys might be after such a strenuous day, their faces were full of eager enthusiasm. The spirit that animated each fellow made him forget his aches and pains. Fond of camping out, the idea of being allowed to patrol the town with the full permission of the mayor appealed very strongly to every scout, and they were impatient for Hugh to announce his plans.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ALARM.

“How are we going to do this patrol work, Hugh?” asked Billy Worth as he and Jack Durham pushed their way to the front of the group surrounding the assistant scout master.

“I’ll appoint squads, and they are to be divided into couples,” replied the leader of the troop. “No scout is to go alone because he may be set upon, and with two, it’s always possible to give the alarm. Then we’ll have signs and passwords. If help is wanted, you must call out with the sign of your patrol—the Hawks giving their ‘Kree-kree-eee,’ the Wolves a loud ‘How-ooo-ooo,’ the Foxes ‘Skee-eee-eee,’ and the Otters ‘Yap-yap-yap’! You all understand that only in case help is needed are you to utter these patrol calls.”

“And if we catch any fellow trying to litter up the town, what’s going to happen to him?” asked Alec Sands grimly.

“I want to get the sentiment of the troop on that subject,” said Hugh. “Don’t all talk at once, but tell me what you think we ought to do. You know the mayor hasn’t exactly ordered us to do it, but probably he expects that if we catch any of that crowd doing what the proclamation forbids, we ought to hand the fellow over to one of the police force, to be taken to the lock-up.”

The scouts did not seem to favor this idea very much. All sorts of dissenting notes arose.

“Huh! and if we did that how many of you expect he’d reach the cooler?” demanded Dick Bellamy, who was of a skeptical turn when it came to believing any good of the police.

“Chances are they’d let the fellow slip through their fingers and then say it was

an accident that couldn't be helped," added Monkey Stallings, the boy who was so agile that he could perform all manner of circus tricks as though born to the spangles and the sawdust arena.

"Hugh, don't make us take that bitter medicine," urged Spike Welling. "Make up some other scheme of your own. Seems to me we ought to take the case into our hands if we manage to make a capture. Somebody might carry a whip along, and we'd give him a taste of strap oil that'd cure him from prowling around nights, spoiling the looks of things."

Hugh shook his head at this ferocious suggestion.

"I don't think that would do at all," he said at once. "It might get us into trouble. We're not in the White Cap business, you see. But it might do to give the prisoner his choice between being handed over to the police or taking a ducking."

"That's the ticket!" cried Cooper Fennimore with enthusiasm. "Cool him off by dipping him in the river a few times, clothes and all. My stars! After he found the scouts meant business from the word go and wouldn't stand for any foolishness, I guess he'd quit his funny work and behave. Talking won't go with that crowd; you've just got to do things. That's the only kind of lesson they'll learn."

Others made suggestions along various lines. Some of these were comical, and others seemed too barbarous to think of entertaining for a minute. After all was said and done, it appeared to be the consensus of opinion that in case they did make a capture the plan outlined by Hugh had better be put into execution. If the fellow was stubborn and would not make a choice between two evils, then the scouts could do it for him, and every one knew what would happen then, for the police must find their own prisoners.

All preliminaries were soon arranged. Each scout knew just what his duties and privileges were to be. They went forth full of a desire to acquit themselves with credit to the whole troop. And no doubt every fellow was secretly hoping deep down in his heart that the offending Corbley crowd would not change their minds and lie low on this particular night. Although they belonged to a peace organization, the scouts loved action. Nothing pleased them more than to have things happening thick and fast, giving them delicious little thrills all the while.

Once again the night favored them.

The moon was already “doing business at the old stand,” as Billy described it, and this promised to be of considerable importance to the boys who meant to roam the streets for hours in couples, keeping a bright lookout for offenders desirous of defying the mayor’s proclamation.

It being Saturday night, there were an unusually large number of people abroad, as was always the case at week-ends. On this particular occasion it seemed to be in the air that something out of the ordinary might be expected. No one knew what, and consequently men, women, boys and girls thronged the principal streets up to nine o’clock.

That time came and went with everything appearing as usual and no outbreak occurring. Hugh had taken it for granted that the young vandals would not venture to bother the park again, knowing that the police had it under their eye; and besides, there were far too many persons abroad in that section of the city for them to venture to show themselves there.

If they did break loose at all, the attack would likely enough come in another quarter entirely. Feeling confident of this, Hugh disposed of his scouts in such a manner that they could guard the parts where the police did not patrol: the residence sections.

He and Billy walked around and followed the beat which they had taken it upon themselves to cover. Everything was being conducted with military exactness. They had not forgotten the methods of the two rival armies in the mock battle, when they had served as signal corps operators, nor the example of the Naval Reserves, nor the work of the Life Savers.

When the two reached one end of their beat, they waited until another pair of khaki-clad figures approached, and then the secret countersign was passed between them in whispers. After that Hugh and Billy walked to the other end of their beat, and there rubbed up against another couple of scouts.

Ten o’clock came, and as yet all was well. Some of the boys began to weary of this unusual exertion. They had had a warm day and a most strenuous one as well. It did not seem surprising, then, that they should find themselves yawning at a terrific rate, and beginning to wish that something would happen, or else that Hugh would order them home.

This sort of thing was going on all over the section where Hugh had figured it was most likely the prank-loving vandals would start their work, if they ventured to do anything at all. The score and a half of scouts had been placed in such manner as to cover quite a large space. If Lige and his followers managed to slip inside the lines and cut up any tricks, they would have to be mighty crafty about it, for every scout was supposed to be constantly on the alert, watching right and left for suspicious conditions.

“Looks as if it might have been a case of bluff, doesn’t it, Hugh?” Billy said, when another half hour had crept past. Sounds from downtown were dying out as people went home, believing that there would not be any excitement, after all.

“It’s a little too early to settle that question, I’m afraid, Billy,” replied the assistant scout master. “If they meant to do anything, you wouldn’t expect them to start in until as late as this, anyway. We’ll try to hold out till midnight, and then if nothing starts, why I suppose we’ll have to go home and take chances.”

“Whee, an hour and a half yet, that means!” said Billy with a big sigh, as the church clock rang the half hour. He was hardly able to drag one fat leg after the other such was his utter weariness, but being the possessor of a stubborn spirit, Billy would not confess that he felt anything but “chipper.”

“Something may happen before then to change our plans,” Hugh told him. “If we managed to make a capture, I think you’d brighten up.”

“Just try me,” replied Billy, endeavoring to look as though he were not half dead for sleep; for Billy’s two great weaknesses were a love for lying in bed mornings, and a dislike to leaving the dinner table so long as anything to eat remained in sight.

“When the Chief came around just a little while back to see how we were getting on, he said he did not expect to have any trouble to-night,” Hugh continued. “That fierce proclamation from the mayor seems to have convinced him that the evildoers will all take to hiding. But we know different. Fellows like Lige Corbley and their crowd think very little of the mayor’s backbone. You see, about every one of them has a father or uncle who can exercise his ‘pull’ with the authorities, and they rely on that to get them off in case of trouble.”

“That sounds true to me, Hugh,” Billy observed; “but then, the city was never so much worked up as now, and the people won’t stand for any of that funny

business. If the mayor is back of us, then the Chief had better look out or he'll lose the number of his mess. Seems to me he's on to that fact, too, which accounts for the way he acts toward us scouts. We represent thirty-eight families, and some of the most influential in town. Guess he begins to think he's fooling with a buzz-saw when he tries to go against the sentiment of the best citizens."

"Watch that fellow over there, Billy," said Hugh, putting out his hand and holding his companion still under the shadow of a willow tree.

"It's a boy, isn't it? He seems to be looking around as if he wanted to find out whether this section was being patrolled and where the guards hold out, eh, Hugh?"

"Do you notice that he's got his cap drawn away down over his face? But it seems to me that his walk is familiar," Hugh responded. "If you asked me who he is, I'd give a guess and say Andy Wallis!"

"The Chief's own nephew!" ejaculated Billy.

"Yes, and as he doesn't live in this part of town at all, the question is: what brings him here?" remarked Hugh in a whisper, all the while watching the actions of the shadowy figure across the street.

The boy may have suspected that he was seen, for suddenly starting to whistle, as though he did not have a care in the wide world, he walked off at a more rapid pace and vanished around the near-by corner, where he would enter upon the next patrol's post.

"Do you think he was spying out the land, Hugh?" Billy inquired eagerly.

"That's hard to say," came the answer; "but one thing is sure, he wouldn't be in this neighborhood unless he had some scheme in his head. I'm inclined to think he is acting as a sort of decoy to draw some of us away while others get in their work."

"Gee! that sounds interesting," remarked "Billy the Wolf," as his chums often called him, no doubt because he was so often heard practicing the long-drawn howl of the Wolf Patrol.

The two scouts continued to pace their beat industriously. Billy had managed to

overcome that dreadful feeling of drowsiness, for a time at least. Of course it was bound to come back again later on with increased energy; but the growing possibility of something stirring happening was keeping him on edge now.

Perhaps ten minutes later, or it may have been no more than eight, around the corner came a flying figure that quickly resolved itself into a boy wearing the well-known khaki suit of a scout.

It was no other than Arthur Cameron, whose beat adjoined that of Hugh and Billy and with whom they had exchanged passwords many times since going on duty.

Arthur was plainly wild with fresh excitement, and Billy's heart began to beat fast with anticipations of coming news.

"What ails you, Arthur?" demanded the assistant scout master, as the other came close up, panting for breath.

"They're there, and doing it for keeps!" gasped Arthur.

"Where do you mean, and what are they doing?" asked Hugh quickly; while doubtless Billy was saying to himself something like, "Oh, joy! joy! now we'll get it!"

"Over in the mayor's front yard, playing hob with everything!" Arthur burst out.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOCKING THE MAYOR.

This thrilling news awakened Hugh to the fact that after all the bold Corbley crowd meant to defy the mayor. They had “taken the bull by the horns,” and to make the lesson all the more impressive, had selected the front yard of His Honor as the scene of their vandalism.

Now Hugh had dimly suspected that something along these lines might happen, and for that reason had chosen to be close to the scene. He knew the place of the mayor very well, as he had seen it year in and out while passing to school and back.

The owner took considerable pride in the well-kept lawn and the shrubs he had planted, some of them coming from foreign lands. In fact, it was one of the show places in town, and strangers were usually piloted around that way to see how lovely one of the local homes could appear.

Reckless of consequences, indeed, must the young rascals have been, thus to bring matters straight home to the head of the community. Hugh was satisfied that they were really playing into the hands of the good women who had long endeavored to arouse the sluggish mayor, but in vain. If the wanton destruction wrought by these vicious boys was brought home to him, His Honor would have no other course to pursue than to push the war until he had broken up the unruly gang and made people understand that he was going to stand back of the Town Improvement League.

So Hugh was in no particular hurry to get around there and bring the operations of the vandals to a stop. It would be a pity to burst in upon them too soon, when they were doing the finest thing possible to end this reign of lawlessness that had gripped the pretty city in its throes.

Besides, it was necessary that they summon others of the scouts to help them in the round-up. Half a dozen, at least, should be on hand in order to make a sure thing of it.

Hugh had all this sort of thing already figured out in his mind, so that when the emergency came along he did not have to do any thinking. The motto of the scouts, "Be Prepared," he had taken to heart long ago and never let an opportunity pass for laying his plans in case certain things came to pass.

Just on the other side of the beat that he and Billy the Wolf were covering, he knew could be found Alec and Bud Morgan, two of the most dependable of the troop. Counting the side partner of Arthur, who was no other than Monkey Stallings, there would thus be six of them in all, which Hugh determined ought to be enough to carry out his plans.

Advancing part way toward the next meeting point, Hugh gave the Wolf cry in a subdued fashion. If Bud should hear this he would know that he and his partner were needed in the quarter from whence the cry sprang.

Twice more did Hugh sound the call to action. Then he heard the swiftly moving patter of feet and the two scouts came hurrying into view, looking eager and fit for business.

"What's up?" asked Alec, as he and Bud Morgan joined the others.

"The gang is at work, doing all the damage they can to the mayor's front lawn. We want to try and round them up in a hurry," Hugh explained.

"How many are there of them?" asked Bud, not that he cared what the answer might be for fear of consequences, but only for general information and interest.

"I forgot to ask Arthur about that," declared Hugh, turning to the scout in question and adding, "How about it?"

"We saw three of them at work," replied the other, just as Monkey joined him, "and there may have been yet another keeping watch on the street so as to let them know if the cops were coming."

"Did they see you running away?" asked the scout leader.

“We tried to keep from showing ourselves, but even if they did, chances are they think we were heading for downtown to tell the police,” Arthur replied.

“Well, what we want to do is to get into the Simmons place, next door to the mayor’s, and climb through the hedge. Then we’ll try to lay our plans so as to close in around one particular chap and gobble him,” Hugh explained in a low voice.

“But what if he shows fight? Do we lick him into subjection?” asked Bud, acting as though ready to roll up his sleeves and pitch in.

“Don’t hit him any more than you can help,” warned Hugh. “It might reflect on us as scouts if we gave him a black eye. People would say we were only the same old brand of fighters under a new name. But hold on tight, and if you can only get him down, sit on him. That ought to be enough to tell you what to do.”

“Leave it to us, Hugh,” said Bud Morgan with a chuckle. “We’ll do our level best to convince the chap he ought to stop over awhile with us, and find out if the water is still as warm as it was last month.”

“Then come right along, and keep low down,” directed Hugh, starting toward the gate of the place adjoining that of the mayor.

The other five boys trailed after him like Indians, every fellow bending down and walking as silently as the conditions permitted. Hugh opened the gate and they passed through. Across the lawn they started, heading for the fine big hedge that stood on the line between the properties.

You would have thought that Hugh had been there before, spying out the land, or that some sense of intuition led him to find the one place in all that hedge where it was thin and the barrier weak, for he struck it almost the first thing. Well, possibly he *had* noticed this fact that afternoon when walking past the home of the mayor. It often pays to take note as you go, and scouts find that out in their everyday experiences.

Reaching the hedge, Hugh looked through one of the small openings where the foliage was unusually thin. He could see the fine lawn of the adjoining place, with its choice shrubs and bordering trees.

Immediately he discovered moving forms. They looked shadowy in the

deceptive moonlight, but Hugh felt sure they were just boys, going about trying to do all manner of things that would tell the owner that they snapped their fingers with contempt at the order he had taken the trouble to issue, which was staring down at passing citizens from every fence and blank wall in town.

Yes, there were three of them in sight. Just what they were doing, Hugh could not say; but he plainly heard the sound of cutting, and thought that they might be damaging some of those highly prized foreign shrubs for which the mayor had paid fancy prices.

Like a general surveying the field of battle, Hugh took in the details, and in a few seconds he had planned his campaign. Napoleon could not have done it better, so the other scouts thought, after they had heard what he whispered to them.

At a certain moment, when the backs of the intruders happened to be turned, they were one and all to crawl through the hedge. Every scout was expected to keep his eyes fixed upon the moving figures beyond, and should one of them seem to act as though suspicious of the presence of the newcomers, Hugh would give the shrill call of the katydid. Upon hearing this each was to remain perfectly motionless until the tiny cry of the cricket announced that it was safe to be advancing again.

Twice did this occur while they were making the passage of the hedge; but owing to the extreme care taken by the scouts, those they were trying to surprise did not appear to have taken alarm, as would certainly have been the case had they suspected that enemies were near.

From that time on, Hugh figured upon creeping along in the dense shadow of the hedge until he could lead his followers to a certain spot where he had hastily calculated that one of the three vandals was heading.

It was evident that the scouts had profited by what experience they had had in creeping up on an imaginary enemy, for they conducted the operation splendidly. The fellow who was slashing away at the foliage of the bushes, chuckling while he worked as though vastly enjoying himself, had not the slightest suspicion of hovering danger until Hugh gave the Wolf call and six figures quickly surrounded him.

There were cries of alarm from the other two roughs, who melted into the

shrubbery, doubtless under the impression that the whole scout troop was on the field, ready to encompass their capture. So the unlucky one was left to the tender mercies of the half-dozen scouts.

He saw that his case was desperate and immediately tried to dash through the encircling line. This action had been anticipated, however, and instantly two of the most active scouts pounced upon him, Monkey Stallings actually fastening upon his back as though he were the Old Man of the Sea whom Sindbad could not get rid of when once he had him on his shoulders.

For a brief time there was something of a mix-up, and even the quick percussion of blows could be heard. No one ever admitted who was responsible for them, although Bud Morgan carried not only a blackened eye for a week, but skinned knuckles into the bargain.

It soon ended in the trespasser being made a prisoner, and his hands tied behind his back with a thong that had been carried along for this very purpose. When they came to look at him, now that his cap was knocked off, it was found that their captive was a fellow by the name of Betts Smith, known among the boys of the town as "Whistling Smith." The reason for giving him that name was rather a queer one. It seems that he stuttered dreadfully at times, and in order to be able to stop when once started, he was in the habit of taking in a quick breath and then uttering a sharp whistle or two, after which, singular to say, he could go on speaking as rationally as any one.

The scouts took him out on the street and then offered him a choice between being ducked or handed over to the police to be locked up. Perhaps he hardly believed that they meant to carry out either threat, or his infirmity may have taken such a grip on him that he could not utter a word in reply. Whatever the cause, he was silent.

Accordingly, the boys took it upon themselves to pronounce sentence. Then while Hugh went to leave word for the rest of the troop to close up and protect the mayor's place against a return of the raiders, his followers decided not to wait for him but to hustle the prisoner at once toward the river bank.

Hugh was surprised to find them gone on his return. He had expected that nothing would be done toward punishing the captured boy until they had all gathered for the purpose. Of course he could give a good guess as to which

direction the others had taken, and with more or less apprehension he hurried after them.

As he drew near the river, he could hear the boys talking. They seemed to be trying to impress the wretched victim with a sense of the punishment that was about to be dealt out to him. Whistling Smith tried in vain to say something. He grew thicker and thicker in his utterance, owing to excitement and alarm; but it could be fairly well understood that he was pleading with them not to throw him into the river, which was deep at that point, with a rapid current.

“He says he doesn’t know how to swim, fellows,” Bud Morgan was heard to call out; “but that’s all a cooked-up story. Of course, every boy knows how to swim. Overboard with him, clothes and all. He’s got to learn that this town’s going to be a clean town after this. We’ll begin by giving him a bath. Souse him in!”

There followed a tremendous splash, and Hugh sprinted for all he was worth lest he arrive too late. Even as he came up, he heard Arthur Cameron cry out:

“Look at him go under, will you? Say, perhaps he spoke the truth when he said he couldn’t swim a stroke! Do you think he can be drowning out there? Bud, why don’t you jump in and grab hold of him? There, he’s gone down again!”

Some one sprang past, shedding shoes and coat as he ran. Then there was another splash, as Hugh Hardin leaped headlong into the moonlit river and struck wildly out for the struggling figure of the late prisoner, already fighting for his life.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT SCOUTS KNOW.

Bud Morgan had started for the water, overcome with remorse and fear, but Hugh far outstripped him in the race, reaching the imperiled lad before Bud left the bank.

Just before the scout master arrived, and ere he could place his eager hand on Whistling Smith, the latter went down again. This was the third disappearance, and he was so terrified that there was great danger lest it be the last. He had kept his mouth open most of the time, and must have swallowed great quantities of water during his frantic struggles.

Hugh had anticipated just such a happening. He had kept a close watch upon the other as he approached, and in this the light of the full moon proved of great value, enabling him to see what was going on.

Quickly gauging the conditions, he dove and stretched out both hands, seeking to clutch the garments of the helpless boy. Had he misjudged distances even by the fraction of a foot, he might have missed connection, and in that case the consequences would have been very serious.

Fortunately, however, Hugh had kept his head and did not make a failure of his effort to locate the object of his search. As soon as he came in contact with the boy, he seized him and arose to the surface, battling with all his energies to overcome the dreadful suction of the current of the river.

Just then Hugh had but one thought, and this was to get Smith's head above the water as quickly as he could. Every second that the other remained under added to the possibilities of his drowning, for he might be so far gone when they got him ashore that all their skill would fail to restore him.

The boy had ceased to struggle. While this may have seemed a serious thing, at least it aided Hugh in his effort to save the other. He did not have to contend with a frantic creature, ready to clutch him about the neck and drag him down in an effort to climb out of the depths.

Scouts fortunately are early in their career instructed in such important things as saving a comrade who may be in peril of drowning. One of the chief benefits of the annual camping-out experience is that it enables every member of the troop not only to learn how to swim and dive and take care of himself in the water, but also to know how to rescue a comrade who has been seized with a cramp, and even resuscitate him after he has been brought safely to the shore.

Had Whistling Smith tried to clutch Hugh, the scout master would have kept him at arm's length, even though rough measures were required in order to bring this about. Sometimes it even becomes necessary to stun the drowning one so that he can be handled safely, for once he throws his arms around the neck of the would-be rescuer, the chances are that both will perish.

When Hugh came to the surface with his helpless burden, he found Bud swimming aimlessly around, calling his name piteously. The scout seemed to be dreadfully broken up by the sudden terrible catastrophe that had stared them all in the face. Not finding Hugh there when he arrived at the spot, he had jumped to the conclusion that the other must have been seized by the drowning boy and dragged under.

"Oh, Hugh! I thought you were gone!" he managed to gasp, as he suddenly discovered his chum right alongside. "Did he pull you down with him?"

"No, but I had to go down after him," said the other tersely. "Give me a hand here, Bud, so as to keep his head above water. He's pretty near gone, I tell you."

"You better believe I will," cried the other, his teeth chattering as he spoke. It was not the chill of the water that caused this, but a dreadful fear lest Whistling Smith might never recover, and that blame would be attached to him for having thrown the other into the river for a ducking.

Bud was as eager as any one could be to do all in his power. Indeed, he shouldered more than his share in towing the helpless boy to the shore; and the two scouts were soon wading in the now shallow water toward the spot where their comrades eagerly awaited their coming, ready to lend what aid they could.

In solemn fashion then was Whistling Smith lifted to the bank and laid on the green grass. The cold moon looked down, and showed them that his face was ghastly white.

“Oh, Hugh, you don’t think he’s dead, do you?” asked Arthur Cameron in an awed tone; while poor repentant Bud could not muster up enough courage to utter a single sound. He simply stood there, with his knees secretly knocking together, and prayed ever so fervently deep down in his heart that nothing so terrible should come of this attempt to cure the vandal of his evil ways.

Hugh forgot that he was soaked to the skin. He realized that something must be done immediately to bring back the breath of life to the almost drowned boy, who, if left there to himself, would doubtless never come to his senses again.

“Turn him over on his face, boys,” he said first of all, as he prepared for the task that was before him.

The other scouts, knowing the whole process, extended Smith’s arms as far above his head as possible. Meanwhile Hugh immediately knelt astride the body, a knee on either side, in such a position that he could easily press downward on the short ribs.

Smith had been under the water such a brief time that Hugh did not have any great fear of the result. Still, until there were signs of restored breathing he did not intend to take any chances, and he went about his task as though the other had been at the bottom of the river for several minutes.

Pressing heavily downward upon the boy’s back between the short ribs, Hugh thus forced the breath from his lungs. Then by relieving the pressure, there was more or less of an intake of air. This movement he repeated again and again, taking care not to work too fast, about once every four seconds being the proper thing.

All this while, what water Smith had drawn into his lungs was oozing from his mouth, on account of the position in which he had been placed in the beginning.

Bud Morgan sat there rubbing one of the boy’s legs furiously, as though under the impression that he could thus induce a certain amount of animal heat by friction, and in a small way help things along. Alec was working on the other leg, while the balance of the scouts hung around, ready to carry out with alacrity

any order given by Hugh.

After all, it did not prove to be a bad case, thanks to the promptness of the rescuers. In a short time Arthur declared that he had heard what sounded like a sigh coming from Smith. Hugh himself noticed a slight muscular movement, though he did not in the slightest degree relax his labors; if anything, he increased the force with which he kept that artificial respiration going.

In ten minutes more the boy began to wriggle, and presently they were able to turn him over on his back. As he stared up at them, Bud found himself trembling like a leaf to find that after all a tragedy had been averted.

“Are you feeling better, Smith?” asked Hugh.

“W—w—where am I? W—w—what happened?” gasped the other, as the first touch of color began to creep into his white cheeks.

“You were in the river,” said Bud quickly, as though ready to shoulder all the blame. “We thought you were only fooling when you said you couldn’t swim a stroke. It was your brother that used to be a regular fish in the water. We got you mixed, you see, and thought you were just trying to pull the wool over our eyes. But I guess you’d have drowned if it hadn’t been for Hugh here. He dragged you out after you went under the third time.”

“With your help, Bud,” interposed Hugh modestly.

“I don’t deserve a bit of credit,” said the other scout moodily. “I was a fool to do what I did. Smith, I hope you can forgive me. We wanted to punish you for littering up the mayor’s lawn the way you helped to do. That was a shame, but two wrongs don’t make a right. Perhaps you were led into it by that scheming Lige Corbley. There’s some excuse for you, Smith, but none for me. I’m a scout, and I ought to have known better. Will you shake hands and forgive me for throwing you into the river?”

Whistling Smith was more or less dazed. He looked hard at Bud, as though trying to connect matters in his mind. Then he slowly raised his hand, for he was still very weak.

“I reckon it’s all right, Bud,” he said. “I was a fool myself to be led into that silly game. Perhaps I only got what I deserved. In the future, I mean to cut loose from

that crowd. They're too swift for me. This is going to be a big lesson, let me tell you. I don't know what my mother'd have said if I was arrested and locked up. If you fellows are willing to call it an even thing, I am."

Every one of the scouts quickly declared that they stood ready to wipe all scores off the slate. Others besides Bud felt a sensation as of remorse; and they were glad beyond words that things had come out as favorably as they had. If Whistling Smith had never been resuscitated, what misery would have been their portion through the remainder of their lives.

"It wouldn't have happened if we'd only waited for Hugh to get here," admitted Arthur frankly. "Chances are he'd have believed what you said and only soused you in shallow water. We took big risks in doing what we did. You've had a lesson, Smith, you say, but think of us scouts not knowing better!"

"Yes," added Alec, also repentant now, "and come to think of it, I ought to be kicked for not remembering that it wasn't Whistling Smith but his brother Bob who could swim like a duck. Slipped my mind in all the excitement. Never again for me will such a thing as this happen."

"I think we all have good reason to be thankful it was no worse," declared Hugh; "but get up and exercise some, Smith. We want you to warm up before you start on a run for home. Get to bed as soon as you can, and be sure to have a blanket on. The weather is so warm I don't think you'll be apt to suffer from your ducking."

They rubbed him vigorously until he declared that he felt as warm as toast, after which he was started for home on the trot.

"Any use of our going back on duty again, Hugh?" asked Billy, stifling a yawn.

"I don't think so," was the reply. "Lige and his crowd have done all the damage they wanted to probably, and there'll be nothing to bother us for the rest of the night. We're all tired and two of us wet through, so we'll strike the home trail now."

"How about the rest of the fellows who are still on duty? Going to leave them to stand guard the whole night through?" asked Billy.

"Well, that would be a hard joke on them," Alec declared. "Send me with any

message, Hugh. You and Bud had better make a break for home, and get out of your wet clothes in a hurry.”

“All right then, Alec,” the other told him. “Take the order that they’re to give up work for to-night and get away home. And perhaps you’d better not say anything about what happened here in too big a hurry. We’ll speak of it at the next meeting. I think there’s a lesson in it for every scout. I know I feel that I’ve had one myself.”

“Huh! think of me, will you?” declared Bud with a sigh. “Even when Arthur yelled out that Smith was drowning, I was so scared that for just five seconds I couldn’t move hand or foot. That might have been long enough for him to disappear the last time. But you shot past me and into the river like a flash. You haven’t a single thing to be sorry for, Hugh. And let me tell you, for one, I’ll never stop thanking my lucky stars that you got here just when you did. I’d be feeling some different from what I am right now if you’d delayed a minute longer.”

Alec ran off to carry the scout master’s order to the rest of the troop that would relieve them from vidette duty, while the balance of the boys started for their various homes, satisfied with the outcome of the series of adventures.

CHAPTER X. THE ACCUSATION.

“Well, things seem to be moving right along, Hugh,” Billy Worth remarked several days later, as he and the assistant scout master stood on the main street in front of the window where there was a fine display of sporting goods that always attracted the attention of every passing boy.

“Yes, it’s wonderful what a change has come over the whole town,” the other scout remarked. “It seems as though the scouts must have given everybody the fever, because it’s going on all around. Even the Italian district has been stirred, for the mayor has offered a splendid prize to the family that has the neatest dooryard on the first of the month. Such a scrubbing and raking and gathering of rubbish never was seen before. Poor old Barney Heath says he’s earned his salary three times over, and that if this thing gets to be a settled habit he must be paid by the load and not by the month under contract. He’ll soon be going to the poorhouse, he vows. But it looks glorious to me, Billy.”

“My folks say we deserve a heap of credit for taking the bull by the horns,” Billy observed, with a grin of pride on his freckled face. “But the women all think it was the way that gang carried on in the mayor’s front yard that gave him all the backbone he’s shown since. Nothing like bringing things home to a man if you want to stir him up.”

“Touch his pocket and you’ll get a response, my father says,” Hugh replied. “I wish I’d been there when he came out of his house that fine Sunday morning and discovered what a mess they’d made of his place! But somehow nobody seems to have been able to get any trace of those who did it. They made sure to leave nothing behind to tell who they were, and have been lying low ever since. I’m rather thinking they’re a bit frightened themselves at their boldness.”

“Huh! I don’t believe anything could scare that Lige Corbley,” grunted Billy;

“and speaking of him, there he comes along the street right now with his little lame brother, Benjy. Say, what a queer mixture that boy is, Hugh! Watch him helping Benjy along just as carefully as you would do it yourself! I never could make out what that Lige was made of.”

“And that’s the very reason I told you once that I didn’t think he could be all bad,” said the other in a low tone, for the object of their conversation was now approaching them. “Any fellow who could act like that toward a poor little chap with a twisted leg must have a decent streak in him. And if ever Lige is going to change his ways, you mark my words it’s bound to come about through that same brotherly affection he feels for Benjy. It may never happen, and then again how do we know? Stranger things than that have come to pass.”

A crowd of boys coming along the street stopped to gape in at the window of the sporting goods store, making comments about the football and hockey paraphernalia displayed there in tempting fashion.

Several men and women were also looking in at the gorgeous window of the adjoining jewelry establishment, so that for the time being there was quite a gathering at that one spot.

Lige Corbley, leaving his crippled brother to feast his eyes with the sights in both windows, which he did not often have a chance to survey, passed into the store that displayed fishing tackle and all manner of men’s goods evidently bent on making some small purchase.

In doing this he came in contact with the two scouts, and their eyes met. Lige stared Hugh straight in the face, and what seemed to be a smile of defiance came across his dark countenance. It was as though he had heard what had happened to Whistling Smith, and had been assured that his identity was known to the scouts who had appeared on the scene while he and his pals were defying the mayor by wrecking his well-kept lawn and shrubbery.

Billy turned and looked at his chum after Lige had gone into the store.

“What do you think of that now, Hugh?” he asked. “Did you ever see a fellow throw down the gauntlet like he did? Dares us to accuse him, and wants to know how we could prove it! For three cents I’d like to ask you to take the challenge up. We could give him a heap of trouble, I reckon. And everybody believes that it was his gang that made the ruin at the mayor’s place, even if nothing’s been

done about it.”

Hugh, however, shook his head in the negative.

“Things are going along too well right now, Billy, to change them,” he said. “We might be able to prove what we claimed, and then again, how do we know? All we’ve got to go on is the word of Whistling Smith, and he would have to turn informer. Better let it drop and wait to see how things turn out. Lige and his crowd builded better than they knew when they paid that visit to the mayor’s place. It was the beginning of the end.”

Billy did not seem to be wholly convinced, for he shook his head and frowned as he stood there on the outskirts of the crowd.

“Well, if you knew Lige as well as I do, Hugh, you’d understand that such a little thing as that isn’t going to faze him any. I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if he’s getting up some other prank right now and means to spring it on the town some dark night. The snake is scotched, not killed. The more you stir up a fellow like him the worse you make things.”

“Wait and see, Billy; don’t be in so much of a hurry,” the other scout replied. “When I worked side by side with Lige putting out that fire in his aunt’s house, I saw him at his best. And when he shook hands with me and as much as admitted that scouts *could* be halfway decent, I saw something in his eyes that’s been haunting me ever since. And I say once more, lots of queer things have happened in this world and will again. One of them may be seeing that same Lige Corbley in the khaki uniform of a scout some fine day.”

At that, Billy snorted his disbelief. He lacked the faith in human nature that Hugh seemed to possess. Perhaps this came from his not being able to read beneath the surface, while his chum made it a practice to look deeper than the outward appearance of things.

Whatever Billy may have been about to remark was lost, because just at that minute there was a sudden commotion inside the jewelry establishment. Loud cries arose and through the door a man came springing as though in a great hurry to get away.

He pushed through the crowd, jostling several people as he went. At the same moment Mr. Garrison, the clerk in the store, was seen in the doorway, white of

face and evidently so excited that he almost strangled.

All he could say, in a weak sort of voice, was the one word:

“Thief!”

The stranger pushed his way through those gathered in front of the window, not being at all gentle in his manner of handling any who interfered with his progress. It happened that the cripple Benjy was directly in his path, so that he came near knocking the little fellow down; and then, as though discovering how helpless the boy was, he threw his arms around him, apparently to keep him from falling.

Before any one could interfere, the thief, who must have had all his plans arranged beforehand, jumped into a buggy that was standing in front of the store, plucked the whip from its socket, and laying it on the back of the astonished animal between the shafts went whirling down the road in a cloud of dust.

Several people hurried around to police headquarters to inform the force that their services were needed and that neighboring towns should be notified of the daring robbery, that the man might be apprehended should he appear.

Others gathered about the door of the jewelry store, all tremendously interested and asking many questions as to what had happened.

The proprietor came hurrying out, for he had been in a rear room at the time of the raid. The dazed clerk was getting his senses back by degrees, though there were evidences that he did not as yet grasp the full meaning of the matter. He appeared to be laboring under the impression that there were a number implicated in the robbery, and that the man who fled had perhaps managed to pass some of his plunder to others standing near by. This was the habit with such clever rascals, he had read.

“What’s that boy got in his hand?” the clerk cried suddenly, pointing straight toward little Benjy Corbley, who was holding something and staring at it with a look of wonder on his thin face. “Why, don’t you see, sir, what I said is the truth? That’s one of the gold watches that were taken. The thief must have confederates in this crowd. If you search every one here you may find other things!”

It was a most ridiculous accusation. The man would possibly never have

dreamed of making it, only that he had just experienced a terrible shock and was hardly yet in his right senses.

He jumped down from the stoop and snatched the article out of the hand of Benjy, who of course made no resistance.

“Where did you get this gold watch, you young imp?” demanded the clerk harshly, as he took hold of the cripple’s jacket and tried to frighten him with a savage look.

Benjy tried to answer but apparently his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, for he could not make any intelligent sound.

“I saw him pull it out of his pocket!” announced another boy standing near.

“Turn your pockets inside out at once,” commanded the clerk, who, it can very easily be seen, was a small-minded man, only anxious just then to turn the attention of his employer from his own lack of due caution to some other cause of blame.

Mechanically, the crippled boy started to do as he was told, but nothing developed through the process. He disclosed a top, several marbles, a broken-bladed knife, some string, a few buttons and a five cent piece, but no more precious watches or jewelry of any kind seemed forthcoming, greatly to the disappointment of the hopeful clerk.

Just then Lige Corbley, who had been the first one to run for the police, strange to say, came hurrying back, followed by the Chief himself, while a couple more officers were seen hastily buckling on their belts as they ran toward the spot.

“Hello! what’s the matter with you, Benjy?” they heard Lige say, as he pushed his way through the gathering crowd, using his elbows without any regard for other people’s ribs.

The appearance of his older brother seemed to make a change in the stunned condition of the cripple. He immediately began to cry, which caused Lige to glare around like an aroused lion, evidently searching for the guilty culprit who had hurt the smaller lad while he was away.

“Who hit you, Benjy? Just point him out to me, won’t you?” he asked, as he

threw a protecting hand across the shoulders of his brother. And at that moment even the presence of the big Chief would possibly not have prevented Lige from trying to visit summary vengeance on the wretch who could stoop to strike a cripple, had Benjy but raised a hand and pointed an accusing finger.

The clerk faced Lige just then. He still held the gold watch in his hand and was in a humor to accuse any one of being an accomplice who dared put in a good word for Benjy.

“Here’s what he had in his pocket, if you want to know,” he snarled, as he dangled the glittering object before Lige’s eyes. “That thief handed it to him as he made off, to keep for him. It’s an old trick, and might have been successful if I hadn’t happened to know all about it. Your brother, small as he is, must be an accomplice in this robbery. And who knows but what you’re in the game, too, Lige Corbley? Your reputation isn’t any too good in this town, let me tell you!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE TURNING POINT.

Lige could hardly believe his ears when the clerk of the jewelry establishment made this astonishing charge, eager to cover up his own carelessness at the time the robbery was committed and to shift the blame.

He stood there and stared, first at the flushed face of the man and then at the tear-stained countenance of Benjy. The crowd jostled and pushed to see and hear, but for a wonder it remained voiceless. Perhaps surprise held the spectators spellbound; or it might be they recognized the fact that Lige Corbley as a rule could fight his own battles.

The boy finally found his tongue, and turning toward his younger brother he exclaimed almost tenderly:

“What does he mean by saying that, Benjy? How could you have that watch in your pocket, when I just left you here a few minutes ago? It can’t be so. He’s lying, to get us into trouble. It must be a set-up job! Tell me, did you ever see that watch before he held it up right now?”

Benjy seemed to have regained his power of speech, also, for he immediately replied to this question by saying:

“I felt somethin’ heavy in my jacket pocket, Lige,—this one it was,—and when I put my hand in, I pulled that watch out. But I don’t know however it came there, cross my heart if I do, Lige!”

The older boy whirled on the clerk, his eyes snapping with anger.

“There, do you hear what Benjy says, Mr. Garrison? He found your old watch in a pocket of his jacket, but if you say he knew anything about its being stolen or had anything to do with the thief, why, it isn’t so and you’re telling what’s a

bare-faced lie. Benjy wouldn't take a pin that wasn't his own!"

He again threw a protecting arm across the shoulder of the smaller lad, who looked up at him with a smile of confidence on his thin face that told of hope renewed. Many times had Lige stood between the weak little chap and trouble; and in the eyes of Benjy he was a tower of strength. With Lige at hand, the cripple could banish fear and feel sure of protection.

The clerk, however, was not yet ready to give up. For some reason or other he seemed anxious to keep attention riveted in another quarter, so as to delay the investigation as long as possible. Perhaps he found his own conscience accusing him of lack of discretion in giving a stranger a chance to seize upon the most valuable contents of the establishment.

"Whether the boy is guilty as a confederate or not," he said, grimly, with compressed lips and a baleful gleam in his pale eyes, "the stolen goods having been found in his possession makes him a partner in the crime, after the act. Until this thing can be looked into more closely he ought to be held, and I call on the police to take him in charge on suspicion!"

He beckoned to the big Chief as he said this. Lige turned white, and then a red spot glowed in either cheek. There were low murmurs of protest from a part of the crowd, as though this high-handed proceeding on the part of the indiscreet clerk struck them as going much too far. But not a hand was raised to bar the officer of the law from doing what was demanded of him.

"Do you mean that you're going to lock my brother up at police headquarters just because that runaway thief chose to drop a watch in his pocket as he was getting out of the crowd?" demanded Lige, staring angrily at the clerk.

"That's what ought to be done," persisted the other stubbornly, looking defiantly around at those gathered there. "If he's able to prove his innocence, no harm will be done."

"No harm!" echoed Lige. "Mebbe you'd like to have *your* boy arrested for somethin' he never done and locked up for hours in the cooler, while they were chasin' after the real thief? How do you think you'd feel to have everybody pointin' at him and saying he'd been accused of stealing and the police had arrested him on suspicion? It's a shame, that's what. Why, Benjy never stole a cent in all his life! Have me taken up if you want to. I've done heaps of tough

things, and everybody knows it. But don't you dare put it on my brother, or _____”

Lige was growing more and more furious. There is no telling what sort of dire threat he might have made toward Mr. Garrison, only that just then he felt some one pluck him by the sleeve and heard Hugh Hardin saying:

“Hold on, Lige. Don't finish that sentence, will you? There's no need of having Benjy arrested. It's an outrage, and every one here will stand back of me when I say that, no matter what Mr. Garrison thinks. He's excited now, and hardly knows what he's doing. Besides, I want the Chief to understand that I saw just how that watch got in Benjy's pocket!”

A faint cheer broke from the triple circle of spectators. It could be plainly seen that all their sympathies lay with the white-faced little cripple. In Lige they had small confidence, but Benjy Corbley had long been an object of more or less consideration, for it was understood that his chances of ever living to grow up to manhood were comparatively zero.

The clerk turned on Hugh. His manner changed more or less, because he realized that he had a different customer to handle in the young assistant scout master. Lige Corbley and Hugh Hardin were quite opposite in reputation. The one was as much respected as the other was looked upon with suspicion. Lige had been the cause of considerable excitement in the town, and was even then considered as responsible for the outrage at the mayor's place of residence.

“How could you see what was done, Hugh Hardin?” Mr. Garrison asked a little weakly, for he began to feel the ground slipping out from under his feet.

“In this way,” returned Hugh promptly, with a quick look full of confidence toward Lige and Benjy. “I saw the man come leaping out of the store and push his way through the crowd. Nobody had the sense to lay a hand on him, but perhaps that was because all of us were so surprised that we didn't understand what it was about until you came to the door and called ‘Thief!’ Benjy happened to be right in his way and the man ran full tilt against him; then, as if he chanced to see it was a little, almost helpless cripple, he threw out both hands to keep the boy from being knocked over. He was holding a lot of watches in one hand and a bag in the other; and I saw with my own eyes one of the watches drop into Benjy's pocket,—that is, I saw it fall out of the thief's hand, and it must have

lodged there.

“So you see, Chief, Benjy didn’t know anything about it until, as he says, he felt something heavy in his pocket, and when he pulled that gold watch out he just stood and stared at it till Mr. Garrison saw him. And of course you wouldn’t want to arrest a boy who was helping to recover the lost goods, would you, sir?”

A general laugh went up at that. The baffled clerk saw that it would be only foolishness for him to persist in his charge after this manful defense of Benjy.

“Oh, if that’s the case and you saw all that happened, Hugh, of course I withdraw my charge. But as you said, I’m so flustrated by this terrible event that I hardly know what I’m doing. So let it drop, Chief, and please get started after the thief. He is in a buggy, and surely you ought to overtake him with your swift auto. If the neighboring towns are notified, he would be apprehended should he try to pass through any of them. It is a serious business with my employer, because the best goods in the store were taken.”

Lige gave the clerk a long, savage look, as though the incident had made such an indelible impression on his mind that it must haunt him for many a day.

Some of those present followed the Chief as he hurried back to police headquarters. Others remained to listen to what was said by the clerk in answer to the numerous sharp questions put by the shocked owner of the establishment, who was engaged in shaking his head and walking nervously up and down, now and then wringing his hands and declaring that he would be ruined unless the thief were apprehended and the goods reclaimed.

Hugh and Billy were about to walk away when Lige strode sullenly up to them. He looked straight into the eyes of the scout leader, and there was an expression on his dark face that probably no one had ever seen there before. Hugh understood. He realized that his simple little defense of Benjy had done more to reach the depths of this wild boy’s heart than anything that could possibly have happened. Had it been a favor done toward himself, Lige would doubtless have striven to pay it back and then wiped the remembrance of the whole occurrence from the tablets of his mind. But he had received such a cruel shock at hearing his little brother accused of being a thief and threatened with arrest, that the act of Hugh in clearing him assumed a magnitude in his opinion far beyond its real value.

“I want to say what I think of you for doing what you did, Hugh Hardin,” he declared resolutely, his jaws set as though in grim determination. “It was white of you, that’s right, and I’ll never forget it.”

“Oh! that’s all right, Lige,” answered Hugh pleasantly, as he thrust out his hand toward the other impulsively. “It was a shame that Mr. Garrison said what he did, and of course we all knew the charge was silly; but he’s so rattled he hardly knew what he was doing. I’m glad I happened to see that man grab hold of your brother and the watch slip out of his fingers. I think Billy, here, must have noticed it all, too, but things happened so fast that his breath was taken away, just as mine was for a minute or so. Better forget all about it, Lige. No harm has been done, you know.”

“That’s easy for you to say, Hugh,” replied the other boy with a sigh, as he eagerly accepted the offered hand, “but it makes me ashamed to think of all I’ve done to break up that scout troop of yours, and here you keep Benjy from being arrested just as if I’d been one of your best friends. I don’t understand it, I tell you! Why should you so much as lift a finger to help a feller that has been so ugly all along, and pestered you and your crowd as I’ve done? Tell me that, Hugh!”

“Why, Lige,” the assistant scout master replied, his kindly smile holding the attention of the other boy, “I suppose it must be because we are scouts, and we believe in doing the right thing, even when it’s an enemy that’s in trouble. If you had ever looked up the habits of scouts, you wouldn’t have to ask me that question. It’s given me more pleasure to be able to lend you a helping hand than ever you could get out of it, and that’s a fact, Lige.”

Lige shook his head, but his eyes did not fall before that steady look.

“I never knew that was what scouts believed in,” he said slowly, as an eager, wistful glow came into his eyes. “I always thought they were only a bunch of sissies that liked being dressed up in khaki suits and parading around in a silly way. Then there was that time you helped put out the fire up at my aunt’s; I seemed to begin to get my eyes opened then, and I’ve been doing a heap of thinking ever since. Hugh, do you think that you’d care to tell me a lot more about this scout racket if I came around to your house some time you set? Honest, I’d like to hear what it stands for.”

“Can you drop around at my house to-night, Lige?” asked Hugh as quick as a flash, remembering his maxim of “striking while the iron is hot.”

“Sure I can, if you say the word. Only set the time,” Lige answered, looking as though his mind were made up.

“Say eight o’clock then; and, Lige, I’ll have nobody there,” the scout leader went on.

“You can look for me. Benjy, shake hands with Hugh. He was a mighty good friend to us to-day, let me tell you, kid.”

As the Corbleys went away, Lige with that brotherly arm over Benjy’s shoulder, Hugh turned and looked at Billy.

“It came a heap sooner than you thought it would, didn’t it, Hugh?” demanded the stout scout, with a grin and a knowing nod. “And I guess that settles the activities of Lige Corbley as the worst boy in town.”

Strange as it may seem, Hugh and Billy were given a chance to take part in the chase of the man in the buggy, who had made such a clean sweep of the jewelry establishment.

They were walking home when the big police automobile hove in sight. Several policemen were aboard and the car was moving at a pace that accorded with their haste.

The two scouts stepped aside to let it pass, meaning to give the men a rousing cheer, when the chief said something to the chauffeur, and suddenly the machine stopped alongside the chums.

“Hop in, Hugh, if you care to go along with us,” the police head called out. “Yes, there’s room enough for you to squeeze in, too, Billy, though you take more than your share of space. I thought that, since your information proved valuable to us, it was only right you boys went along. You’ll enjoy seeing how we get our man.”

“How about it, Hugh? Let’s go,” urged Billy eagerly.

“Pile in!” said Hugh without ceremony; and in another second they had found places among the officers who occupied the tonneau of the car.

Aside from the exciting purpose of the trip, the boys knew that they would enjoy speeding along over the country roads in the fast machine. That would be something of a picnic in itself.

Perhaps the Chief was only showing his gratitude by offering the boys this chance for a run, but he may have looked further. Doubtless he remembered that these scouts had proven themselves well able to follow a trail on an earlier occasion, and he may have foreseen a similar emergency. The fugitive thief might abandon the buggy and take to the depths of the woods afoot, on finding himself hotly pursued, and in that case the boys' services would be most welcome.

That was exactly what happened. The buggy was found, abandoned, and the occupants of the big car, leaving one man to guard it, proceeded to follow the thief's trail.

From that time on, it would have been difficult to coax either one of the two boys to turn back, so intensely interested did they become in everything that pertained to this actual application of their tracking game. Hugh quickly realized that the police knew next to nothing about following a woods' trail. Had they been alone, they would surely have been all at sea at the point where the wily rascal had taken to running the length of fallen tree-trunks, jumping off at the ends into thickets of brush, or on flat rocks where there would be no trail left to betray his course.

But all this was what Billy called "just pie" for boys who had been drilled in the secrets of scout-craft. When they ventured to suggest to the officers how easy it was to "blind" the trail by this sort of clever tactics the Chief ordered them to lead off, promising to follow closely with his men.

It was a proud day for Hugh and Billy when the police head thus showed his confidence in their ability. They felt that they were being amply rewarded for all the time spent in the past in gaining this knowledge of woodcraft.

Through the woods they led the party, every now and then stopping to make sure they were on the right track. In the end they came to an isolated house that was said to belong to a queer old farmer, who never had anything to do with his neighbors. A couple of savage dogs greeted their arrival, which the police would have shot in their tracks, only that the old man came on the scene, and chased the

ugly brutes away.

When he heard what his visitors had to say, the farmer was positive that no one could have come to his place that day; nor had any one been near him for more than a week. But Hugh had heard the clamor, he claimed, of the dogs a quarter of an hour before his party reached the lonely farm; and he felt sure that the fugitive was concealed about the place right then.

So with Billy at his side, he conducted a careful search of the ground, and sure enough they discovered the tracks they sought, issuing from the woods and making straight for the little tumble-down old barn.

When they made this report to the Chief, he had his men quickly surround the place. Then he compelled the farmer to enter and make good use of his pitchfork in tossing the hay from one side to another.

Presently a man's boot was uncovered, seeing which, the Chief seized it and dragged the fugitive into view. The thief struggled and tried to break away, but was soon cowed by the sight of the significant bright brass buttons on the Chief's coat; though perhaps the heavy pistol that was kept pointed at his head had something to do with his docility.

Looking further, they found the bag into which he had thrust all the stuff taken from the store. And so, after all, the jeweler came out of the affair luckily, although that was not the most fortunate result of the incident.

CHAPTER XII.

THANKS TO THE SCOUTS.

That was the beginning of the end of the destructive pranks to be laid at Lige Corbley's door. Hugh managed to arouse such a keen interest concerning scout activities in the inquiring mind of his caller that evening and gave Lige so many things to excite his ambition to join the new Owl Patrol, that he knew the other boy was well on the road to a complete change-about-face.

It came about better than Hugh had hoped, even in his most ardent moments; for Lige not only came as a candidate himself, but managed to bring several other fellows along with him. Evidently the seed had fallen on good ground and was already bearing fruit.

Some of the scouts grumbled a little at the idea of allowing boys to join who had had such a bad reputation. Hugh, however, privately talked with these objectors, and opened their eyes as to what the mission of true scouts must always be. If they meant to be true to their colors and observe the twelve rules to which they had so willingly subscribed at the time they became members of the troop, they must ever be ready to forgive and forget an injury, when asked. They should also be quick to hold out a helping hand so as to lift others, not so fortunately situated as themselves, out of the mire.

It turned out all right in the end. Lige had it in him to be a first-class scout when once he was started along the right lines. He was a natural born leader, even if possessed of a hot temper and owing to several more faults that were calculated to give him more or less trouble all his life.

The town sat up and rubbed its eyes when one fine day during the march of the whole troop through the streets,—it was a crisp Thanksgiving morning, and they were going to attend the football game in order to root for the High School eleven,—it discovered among those khaki-clad boys, Lige Corbley, “Whistling”

Smith, Andy Wallis and Pete Craig, who, only a short time before, had been looked upon as the worst set in all that region.

If they had really and truly turned over a new leaf and meant to live up to the high ideals that governed the scouts, it was evident that the city would enjoy a long period of peace.

Hugh Hardin knew very well that his duty did not end when those boys donned the honored khaki of the troop. They were bound to have an abundance of setbacks, and would no doubt come near falling into their old ways more than a few times. And so Hugh, at the suggestion of the Scout Master, Lieutenant Denmead, kept as close to them as possible, and offered such good advice from time to time that they were enabled to weather the gales that arose.

All this time the scouts had not neglected the great work they had taken upon their shoulders. But since all opposition had practically died out when Lige Corbley reformed, things went along smoothly for them.

“You see,” Hugh explained to some of the boys one day, when they were resting after having cleaned up a spot that had long been an eyesore to the ladies composing the Town Improvement Association, “this thing moves along about as you’d roll a snowball when the snow’s some sticky. It keeps on getting bigger and bigger all the while. First the storekeepers decided to stand back of us and not allow any trash to be swept out on the streets, but to have it gathered up every morning and placed in the right receptacles. Then the house-owners began to take a hand and make their places look spic and span, until now it’s nothing less than a crime to have your front or back yard harbor litter of any kind. And the town council at the last meeting passed a lot of ordinances that the ladies put up to them, so that next summer this is going to be as pretty and neat a city to live in as there is in all New England.”

“Thanks to the scouts!” remarked “Shorty” McNeil, who, although a very quiet member of the troop, was deeply interested in his hobby of photographing wild flowers and plant life in the woods and could appreciate anything that went with landscape gardening.

“If you asked me,” spoke up Alec Sands, with a look toward the assistant scout master that spoke volumes for the new and hearty feelings of friendliness he entertained these days for that worthy, “I’d amend that and put it, ‘Thanks to

Hugh Hardin!”

“So say we all of us!” echoed Billy Worth with a vim. “It was Hugh that thought out the idea first of all, and everybody knows he’s been the mainstay in carrying it through to a finish.”

“None of that sort of talk now, fellows!” declared Hugh instantly. “This was everybody’s fight as well as mine, and there isn’t a single scout but who’s done his full duty just as much as I have. If there is any credit going around, you’ve got to share in it. But after that’s said and done, I think the finest thing of all is the change that’s come over Lige Corbley and those other three boys who are now members of the Owl Patrol, which Lige is serving as leader.”

A silence fell upon the group at that. Some of the older members of the troop had hardly as yet become reconciled to having that quartette of unsavory characters among them, and Hugh, understanding this fact, took occasion to take them to task.

“Now, I know that you’ve only partly agreed with me when we have talked it over in the past,” he said impressively, “but stop and try to put yourselves in the places of Lige and the rest. They were almost outcasts because of their wild ways. Everybody’s hand was against them, and no one would believe a word they said.

“Then this change of heart came, and they cast in their lot with us. I know they’re making a hard fight to hold their own, and we’ve all got to help them, boys. I want you to try and forget what they’ve been in the past, and just consider them fellow scouts, bound by the same high ideals that we are. They’re human, and I give you my word you’ll be astonished at the way those chaps have progressed.

“They’re going to give some others the surprise of their lives soon, when they apply for badges of second-class scouts, because they’re in dead earnest. So wake up and don’t let them feel that you resent their presence. Lige Corbley comes over to my house one night a week right along, and my folks all say they never dreamed he had it in him to turn out to be such a strong character.”

“But you knew, Hugh!” declared Billy. “I can remember you saying that ever so long ago, when I was calling Lige all sorts of names on account of his mean ways. I guess you saw deeper than any of the rest of us. And for one, I give you

my promise that after this I'm going to cut out all remembrance of what they were in the past, and treat them as I would the best fellows on earth."

Among boys an example is as contagious as the measles, and when Billy thus gave utterance to his intentions, the balance of the group hastened to chime in. After that, the scouts belonging to the new Owl Patrol had no reason to feel that they were treated as an alien camp; indeed, warm-hearted Billy Worth, Alec, Dale Evans and a lot more of the others often went far out of their way to extend the hand of good fellowship. So they made Lige and his friends feel that they had really been accepted on an equal footing when taken into the troop.

Things were prospering splendidly these days. Not only had the scouts won the admiration and backing of the ladies of the town, but the men had come to feel a confidence in them that manifested itself in various ways. During that winter, things fairly hummed among juvenile circles. All the better class of sports took on new life, and no longer were wearers of the khaki jeered at as they passed through the streets. Hugh and his comrades had proved their worth to the citizens of their home town, and to be a scout nowadays stamped a boy as deserving both respect and confidence.

While they were of course debarred from any extended trips during the cold weather season and school sessions, they naturally laid out many glorious hikes for the coming summer. It might be the last winter some of these tall boys would spend in the home town, for they anticipated graduating at the June commencement and already had selected the favorite colleges which they hoped to attend in the fall.

On this account, Hugh meant that the coming summer should be a memorable one, crowded with enjoyment and productive of many educational results.

He had every fellow interested in plans along the particular line in which his fancy seemed to run. The season promised to be a notable one in Boy Scout annals, so far as the local troop was concerned.

Although it is not possible for us to follow Hugh and his friends further and to share their anticipated experiences, we can at least prophesy that they will continue to meet the thousand and one emergencies of summer camping life in the same spirit that has distinguished them in all tests since they first learned the value of their motto: "Be Prepared!" And we can add to that prophecy an

assurance, the truth of which these boys have often demonstrated. It, too, is expressed by an old motto, the one adopted by Hugh's classmates, in fact. In Latin it reads: *Dies diem docet*,—which, being interpreted, means: *Day teaches day!*

THE END.

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