



The
BOY SCOUTS
For
HOME PROTECTION

ROBERT SHALER

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THE BOY SCOUTS FOR HOME PROTECTION

BY
SCOUT MASTER ROBERT SHALER

AUTHOR OF "BOY SCOUTS OF THE SIGNAL CORPS," "BOY SCOUTS OF PIONEER CAMP," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE LIFE SAVING CREW," "BOY SCOUTS ON PICKET DUTY," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE FLYING SQUADRON," "BOY SCOUTS AND THE PRIZE PENNANT," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE NAVAL RESERVE," "BOY SCOUTS IN THE SADDLE," "BOY SCOUTS FOR CITY IMPROVEMENT," "BOY SCOUTS IN THE GREAT FLOOD," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE FIELD HOSPITAL," "BOY SCOUTS WITH THE RED CROSS," "BOY SCOUTS AS COUNTY FAIR GUIDES," "BOY SCOUTS AS FOREST FIRE FIGHTERS," "BOY SCOUTS WITH THE MOTION PICTURE PLAYERS," "BOY SCOUTS ON THE ROLL OF HONOR," ETC., ETC.

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The Boy Scouts For Home Protection.

CHAPTER I. TIME THINGS BEGAN TO MEND.

“Here it is springtime again, boys!”

“Yes, and I’m beginning to catch the spring fever. I just feel—well, *torpid* would describe it. I hate to study, or do any work that requires the least exertion.”

“Hey, Billy, there’s one great exception you’ll have to make when you say that—you’ve never let that torpor interfere with your rapid locomotion when you heard the welcome sound of the dinner bell.”

The fat boy in the new khaki suit allowed a broad, good-natured smile to spread over his freckled face.

“Oh, that’s different!” he exclaimed quickly. “I said *work*, please remember, Alec, and as for feeding, why, I always class that under the head of undiluted, unadulterated pleasure.”

“Well, winter has come and gone, with a whole lot of talk about town improvement in the air, and nothing done, just as you were saying, Hugh.”

The manly looking young fellow who answered to the name of Hugh Hardin was patrol leader and assistant scout master. This could easily be learned by any one at all familiar with the various devices used by Boy Scouts to designate rank. On the left sleeve of his coat, just below the shoulder, he had first of all two white stripes, and underneath that a *red* first-class scout badge.

Hugh, as well as a number of other members of the Oakvale Troop, had for some time been authorized to wear certain medals signifying that at some previous date they had been instrumental in saving human life at the risk of their own.

If the reader does not know under what stirring conditions these medals,

typifying the Boy Scout Roll of Honor, were earned, he can have the pleasure of reading all the particulars in previous books of this series, as lack of time and space prevents our mentioning them here.

Besides the leader of the Wolf Patrol there were present on this occasion Billy Worth—the stout member—Alec Sands—who had once been Hugh's most bitter rival for honors, but since heading the Otter Patrol he had grown to be very chummy with him—and Buck Winter.

They attended Oakvale High School and were dismissed about half-past one in the afternoon. They thus had considerable advantage over the boys and girls in the lower grades.

Indeed, at the late hour in the spring afternoon mentioned, numerous little folks were heading homeward in knots, having just been given their freedom. Hugh and his three companions had stopped to chat, having met by accident at that point where traffic was congested—the wagons from the mills crossing in one direction and many big and little cars swinging around various corners.

Somehow or other that particular spot always had a peculiar sort of fascination for Hugh. It had tragic memories, too, for on several occasions serious accidents had occurred here, owing to the speed which some drivers persisted in making while approaching the dangerous crossing.

When Buck Winter, the boy who surpassed most of his chums in animal photography, spoke to Hugh about the dim prospect of anything being done in the matter of improving certain glaring defects in the government of the town, the scout master frowned and shook his head.

“I never saw anything hang fire like this,” he remarked, at the same time watching what was going on close by with keen interest. “There's that crossing over yonder, and some other bad places where children pass over several times a day—it ought to be protected but it isn't. An officer should be stationed there morning, noon and night, to see that traffic slows up when the children are going and coming from school.”

“That's right, Hugh,” burst out the impulsive Billy, whose heart was just as big as his waist was expansive, “and some of these fine days there's going to be something awful happening here! It'll wake this sleepy old town up! For one, I don't believe in waiting till your horse is stolen before you think to lock the

stable door. ‘A stitch in time saves nine,’ they say.”

“Just see how the driver of that big touring car swings down with a rush, will you!” exclaimed Alec, indignantly. “He sounds his siren to beat the band, just as if he expected everybody to scatter like chickens crossing a road, and run for their lives. It’s a beastly shame!”

“Something’s got to be done, that’s all!” said Hugh, with compressed lips, and a flash in his eye that spoke volumes, as he looked after the reckless chauffeur of the car, now speeding away, with a nasty grin of conscious superiority on his face.

“If I was the mayor of this burgh in place of spineless old Strunk,” the impetuous Alec went on to exclaim, “you’d soon hear something pop. I would call the Council in session, and have ordinances passed that would keep these speeders under control. After a few of them had been locked up for a spell, as well as heavily fined, you’d notice a big difference.”

“That isn’t all, by any means,” Hugh chimed in, watching the approach of a bevy of small school girls with apprehension, for the traffic seemed to be at its heaviest. “There are a number of other bad spots in town that need attention. The railroad crossing is utterly unprotected, and last summer one man was killed there, you remember, while twice vehicles have been wrecked.”

“There were some other things you mentioned the last time we talked this over, Hugh, I remember,” said Buck Winter.

“Lots of them,” came the ready reply. “The whole town has grown careless again. True, people don’t litter the streets with waste paper now that they know about the cans placed for such trash—the scouts cured that evil—but there are other defects that ought to be attended to. For instance, some people persist in keeping garbage standing open for the flies to breed in. Others have nuisances about which their neighbors hate to complain of. I know six or seven places where this sort of thing is going on, and I reckon the scouts could trace dozens, if once they had the authority to start in on the job.”

“Oh, I guess I know what you’ve got in mind, Hugh!” exclaimed Billy, with sudden animation. “I was reading the other day how that very thing is being carried out with great success right down in New York City. Boys are given badges to wear, and are called the Auxiliary Police, or something like that. They

have their precincts to watch, and report every sort of nuisance or infraction of the law to their friend, the police captain, who sees that it is abated. They say you would be surprised to see how well the boys do their duty. Things have taken on a new look since the scheme was started.”

“It could be done here a whole lot easier than in such a big city,” affirmed Hugh, eagerly. “We haven’t got such a raft of ignorant foreigners to handle, you see. A good many people up here have just fallen into careless ways, and all they need is to be waked up.”

“We did that other job first class,” said Billy, proudly, “and we’d win out again if only we had half a chance. But I don’t know what keeps on interfering. They must be asleep, and only some terrible accident will startle them to action.”

“Some of the boys have told me in secret about a blind tiger that is being operated since the saloons were shut out of Oakvale,” declared Hugh. “Then I’ve also learned that some of the mill hands get together and gamble, which is against the law. The police, thinking of the votes those fellows can control, seem to wink at such things. There’s no use talking, the women of Oakvale have got to be roused, and join hands with every church in town to clean up the place again, this time for good. The scouts stand ready to do their part.”

“Every time!” added Billy, sonorously, as he whacked Buck Winter on his back, as if to emphasize his remark.

“There are heaps of things that ought to be bettered,” asserted Alec. “They never will be until the scouts and the women join hands with all the good people of Oakvale for a genuine old clean-up time. All they seem to want is a leader. Everybody is waiting for some one else to make the start. Hugh, I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s going to be up to you.”

“I was talking with Professor Marvin, the school principal, only yesterday,” said the scout master, “and he agreed with me that there was great need of all the moral forces in the community uniting for a big fight before things got too bad. He said he would see Mayor Strunk last night, and asked me, as acting in place of Lieutenant Denmead, who is away, to drop around to his house this evening, for he had invited the mayor, Mrs. Marsh and several of the leading ladies of the T. I. A., to take supper with him.”

“Good for that!” cried Billy. “Make sure you rub it in like everything, Hugh,

once you get the chance. I hope to hear great news tomorrow morning, and I'll be ready, for one, to take off my coat and get busy with a broom—of course, figuratively speaking, I mean.”

Alec nodded his head as if pleased.

“Something in the air tells me there are going to be warm doings in this town before a great while,” he asserted positively. “It’s always darkest before dawn, they say, and things have about reached their limit here. Once the new broom gets agoing it’ll sweep out a lot of nuisances that have been an eyesore to all decent people for a long while back. My folks get quite worked up every time they begin to talk about certain things that are objectionable.”

“I’m going to begin and make a list of nuisances right off,” said Buck Winter.

“Well, I don’t like the way you look at me when you say that, Buck,” complained Billy, in affected uneasiness. “I’m going to reform, sure I am. Gimme half a chance, and I’ll even try to reduce my weight, if that bothers you, though I’d hate to cut my rations down to half.”

“Now look at all those vehicles and cars coming along from four directions at once!” exclaimed Alec. “That bunch of kids on the curb has been waiting all of five minutes for a half-decent chance to cross, but do you see any driver holding up to let them go over? They’re a lot of selfish and reckless—— Say, hold on, kids, don’t you dare to try it! Oh! Hugh, look there, one of them has run out! Hi! hi! Hold your horses—stop that car!”

CHAPTER II.

HELP WANTED.

Hugh Hardin was known to be a boy of action. When other fellows were stupefied by some sudden peril, Hugh was doing things.

So in the present instance. He saw the peril of the child even before Alec did, but without uttering a single word, Hugh darted forward as an arrow from the bow, or a hawk pouncing upon some bird.

It was all over in a flash. Alec and the others had started to jump forward, but they would have been too late to be of any real service. Hugh, however, darted in among the congested wagons and moving cars, and, snatching the frightened little child from under the very hoofs of a team, carried her across to the other side of the street.

There was considerable confusion, for drivers were shouting at each other and chauffeurs were trying to push their way past the congested crossing. Apparently they were more concerned with the fact that there had been a mix-up than because a precious human life had just been in jeopardy.

Alec, backed by the other two scouts, pushed out on the street and held up their hands to stop the traffic until the cluster of school children could cross. Some of the drivers seemed to think it a joke, being held up in this fashion by boys in khaki, and laughed good-naturedly at it; but others swore, and made threatening gestures with their whips.

Then, the children having crossed in safety, thanks to their protectors, Alec gave the signal for the wagons and cars to proceed with as much show of authority as any member of the traffic squad in a great city could assume.

The boys were "boiling over" with indignation, as Billy aptly expressed it, as

they walked down the street toward the heart of Oakvale. More than ever, Hugh was now determined not to rest until something had been done toward an eradication of the numerous nuisances that infested the town.

“I’m going to attend that little, informal meeting to-night, boys,” he told his chums, “and unless I miss my guess something will be done. If only the women folks can stir up Mayor Strunk! I understand that several of the pastors will drop in during the evening, and it begins to look as though the last straw has been put on the camel’s back.”

“I only wish,” ventured Billy, wheezing still from his recent violent exertions, “that some of them had seen what happened just now, and how that poor little Anita Burns would most likely have been run over but for Hugh here. It was an object lesson that might have moved even such an old mossback as Mayor Strunk, or Chief Wallis, of the police force.”

“Wait!” was what Hugh told him, and a short time later the group separated.

Hugh performed the errand that had taken him to the business section of town, and then, inspired by a desire to do a little preliminary work along the lines he had had in mind, he dropped over and greeted the head of the local police.

Chief Waller liked Hugh, for he knew what a manly young fellow the other had always proven himself to be. Besides, Hugh was something of a favorite with the better element of Oakvale’s population. He had led a number of movements that, by their success, had brought more or less fame to Oakvale, particulars of which may be found in the earlier books of this series.

So Hugh, using considerable diplomacy, began talking about other things, and after he managed to get the chief in good humor, he introduced the subject that was nearest his heart.

“The women are bound to have the town cleaned up, Chief,” he went on to say, “and you know that when they once set their minds on anything it’s got to happen. They expect to have all sorts of help from you and your men; and the scouts mean to offer their services as they did once before. It’s a great thing to be on the winning side, Chief, so I heard Doctor Kane say to the minister the other day when they were talking over this very matter.”

Now, the Chief was a shrewd man. He knew on which side his bread was

battered. It was true that the politicians and their votes had put him in his present comfortable berth, but the Chief was a married man, and he realized from experience that the home “influence” could be counted on to sway elections when once the people were thoroughly aroused.

“There’s just this about it, Hugh,” he said, impressively. “If the women want a clean town, they’re going to have it, and nothing can stop them. If they get this movement started they can count on the police backing ’em up. All we want is to know just where we stand.”

Thus encouraged, Hugh went on to tell what he had read about the boys of the big metropolis being made Auxiliary Police, and wearing badges that were meant to be respected by the populace.

Chief Wallis apparently had never read about the movement. He seemed to be interested, however, for it was plain to be seen that if things had to be done that offended the politicians, there would be a scapegoat handy on whose shoulders the blame could be cast.

“Well, now, to tell you the truth, Hugh, that isn’t such a bad idea,” he went on to say. “Boys can find out heaps of things that are beyond my men; and once we learned about these nuisances we’d soon abate ’em. All we want is to be shown.”

Hugh understood well enough that the police knew about most of those infractions of the law, but that for various reasons they had pretended not to see them. If only the moral elements of the town were aroused, and firmly demanded a cessation of the law breaking, no doubt the scales would fall from the eyes of the police like magic. It always happens that way, Hugh understood.

Still, Hugh felt that he had gained a point in arousing the interest of the head of the police. It was better to have a combined force working against the evils than a divided one. If the officer realized that his retention in office depended on his active co-operation with the ladies’ league, and the various associations connected with the town churches, he would work like a beaver to do his duty.

After leaving Police Headquarters, Hugh started for his home. His mind, very naturally, was filled with the matters that just then took precedence above all others. Since the preceding fall, Hugh had been trying to figure out how things could be brought to a focus, for they seemed to gradually get worse.

He was in sight of the white picket fence enclosing the Hardin grounds when he heard his name called in a boy's voice. Turning around, he discovered that it was Tom Sherwood, one of the members of the Otter Patrol, who came hurrying along in his wake.

Tom had long been known as an exponent of water athletics and surveying. He meant to become a civil engineer when he left school, and anything connected with this work always interested the boy greatly.

More than a few times, when others of the scouts would go off on a junketing trip such as a school picnic, Tom might have been seen tramping across lots, with a theodolite over his shoulder, accompanied by some boy he had influenced to assist him as chain bearer—bound to some field where he could practice his pet hobby to his heart's content.

Hugh noticed that Tom had a long face when he drew near. This surprised him because as a rule the other was a cheery fellow, and wont to give back smile for smile. It also told Hugh that Tom must have followed him with some purpose in view, for somehow a number of the members of the troop seemed to consider Hugh in the light of a mentor, and often came to him for advice, strange as it might seem, considering the fact that they were all boys.

“Why, hello, Tom! What's the hurry?” he called out, as the other scout drew near.

“Let me get my breath a bit, Hugh, and I'll tell you,” panted Tom, which fact seemed to prove that he must have run quite some distance in order to overtake the scout master.

Possibly his mind being so filled with the idea of town improvement and the contemplated uplift movement, Hugh immediately began to wonder if the agitation of his boy friend could spring from anything he had learned bearing on this subject.

At any rate, he would soon know, for Tom was getting his breath back again. He looked confused, almost ashamed, Hugh thought. There was an expression amounting to positive pain on his face, and it also showed in the way he eyed Hugh, as if he hardly knew where to begin.

They leaned against the nearby fence, as boys are wont to do when talking.

Presently Tom broke the silence.

“Of course, you’re wondering what under the sun I’m going to say, Hugh. I can see it in your eyes. Well, I had made up my mind to ask your advice the very next time I saw you, because I happen to know you’ve managed to get a number of other fellows out of bad holes before this.”

“Well, you’ve certainly got me guessing good and hard, Tom,” said Hugh, with a smile of encouragement. “But if there’s anything I can do to help out, tell me what’s gone wrong now.”

Tom drew an extra long breath.

“The fact of the matter is, Hugh, I’m worried about Benjy, and as I haven’t any father to go to, and women don’t understand boys as well as men do, I hardly knew who to talk it over with till I happened to think of you.”

Hugh was immediately interested, though at the same time relieved to know that Tom was not in any trouble on his own account. Benjy Sherwood was the younger brother of Tom, a bright, aggressive sort of boy, whose faults possibly lay along the line of wanting to have his own way most of the time.

“What’s he been doing to bother you so, Tom?” Hugh asked, quietly and soothingly.

“Why, you know that Benjy is a pretty high-spirited boy,” began Tom. “I’ve tried to check him several times, but he just won’t listen to me, and in so many words gives me to understand he knows his own business, and that I’d better attend to mine.”

“Oh, but that’s generally the way with younger brothers,” said Hugh. “Lots of the fellows will tell you that. So far as I’ve seen, Benjy is no different from the rest. It’s too bad he hasn’t a father, though, because as you said, I believe a man can control such high-spirited boys a lot better than most mothers, who don’t exactly understand how a boy feels.”

“Well, here’s the way it stands,” continued Tom confidentially. “Benjy has been giving mother and me more or less anxiety by going with several fellows that I don’t approve of at all. I happen to know he’s been smoking cigarettes. I didn’t dare tell mother. She has such a silly dislike for tobacco in every shape, you

know. Worse than that, I'm afraid Benjy has been led into playing cards for money."

Hugh shook his head as though worried at hearing this.

"What reasons have you for saying that, Tom?"

"Several," the other immediately replied. "For one thing, I found part of a burned card in our kitchen stove one day not long ago. I supposed Benjy discovered he had it in his pocket, and wanted to destroy it before some one found it on him."

"That might be so," Hugh mused, "and then again he might have had some better reason for wanting to get rid of the cards. Perhaps he's realized, that he was doing something that would grieve his mother, and so made a clean sweep of things."

Tom sighed.

"I only wish I could believe that, Hugh. I'm a whole lot afraid Benjy doesn't give up things he likes so easily. Then there was another suspicious circumstance. I'll tell you about it, Hugh. Just three days ago I found that Benjy had gone and opened his little savings bank at home, in which I knew he had something like three dollars, which he had been laying up towards his summer vacation down at the seashore. When I asked him what he had done with the money he got red in the face, and told me hurriedly that the money was his, and he guessed he could do what he pleased with it."

"And you fear he has used it to pay some debt he owed over the cards—is that it, Tom?" asked the scout master, secretly afraid lest there might be some truth back of Tom's declaration.

"That's what flashed through my mind, Hugh," the other confessed; "and, oh, you can't understand how it's worried me! Why, I've laid awake nights since then wondering what I could do to save poor Benjy. In spite of his high temper, he's a fine boy, if I do say it myself, and I love him with my whole heart and soul. Mother almost worships him. You know he looks so like father! And, Hugh, the idea struck me that perhaps you could think of some way we might make him change his habits."

Hugh would not have been human if he did not feel highly complimented by this blind faith that Tom Sherwood seemed to feel toward him. At the same time, it added to the burdens he was bearing; for as assistant scout master, with Lieutenant Denmead, the regular official head of the troop, away from town so often, it seemed as though Hugh had more than his share of trouble.

“I’ll do all I can to help you out, Tom,” he said. “Perhaps I may find a good chance to talk with Benjy, and get him interested in the scout movement, for he’s really old enough now to think of joining the troop.”

“If you could only do that, Hugh, I’m sure it would make a great difference,” Tom hastened to exclaim. “Joining the scouts has been a good thing for thousands of boys all over the country. They are put on their honor. No fellow can subscribe to the twelve cardinal rules of the organization with his whole heart and still do things that he would be ashamed to have his folks at home know. I hope you can coax Benjy into joining. I tried it once or twice, but somehow he didn’t seem to enthuse worth a cent. But there’s Benjy coming down the street right now. Guess I’ll be going.”

“Leave it to me,” said Hugh, as he shook hands with Tom, who was turning away. “I’ve had some experience in approaching fellows who pretend to scoff at scout doings, and perhaps I can manage Benjy. I’m glad you spoke to me, Tom. Be sure it’ll go no further. So-long! Meeting to-morrow night, remember!”

CHAPTER III.

“STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT!”

Hugh made up his mind, on the spur of the moment, that it might be unwise for him to attempt anything at once. He wanted a little time to think things over, and lay out some plan of campaign, for Hugh did not, as a rule, believe in doing things hastily.

Besides, Benjy must have noticed him talking with Tom, and would immediately jump to the conclusion that it was a conspiracy between them. The result would be disastrous for the success of any future missionary work.

When Benjy came face to face with Hugh, the latter spoke pleasantly. He noticed that the boy colored up, and, although he answered the friendly salutation, he immediately assumed a reckless, indifferent air, and went along whistling as though he had noticed their heads together, and would snap his fingers at them.

Hugh found himself wondering whether it could be conscious guilt that made Benjy fire up so, or simply boyish indignation over being suspected and watched in that way.

“It’s going to be some job managing that boy,” the scout master candidly admitted to himself; but, then, somehow, he always found additional interest in a task that tried his patience, and his powers of endurance, for there could be very little satisfaction in beating an antagonist who was handicapped.

Hugh was unusually quiet on that evening at the supper table, a fact his folks may have noticed. But then they were accustomed to seeing the boy look grave, for owing to the position he held in the scouts, Hugh often had to wrestle with matters that did not give most of the other fellows a moment’s thought.

Later on, Hugh, having gotten his lessons, observed that he was going over to

the home of Professor Marvin, where there was to be a little meeting of people interested in town improvement.

The smile that broke over the face of his mother at hearing him say this so modestly told of the pride she took in the fact that Hugh, as the assistant scout master, should be consulted at all when events of considerable magnitude connected with uplift movements were being discussed.

It certainly must make any mother's heart beat with joy when realizing that her son, though only a boy in years, had become a factor in town, that he has to be consulted, and his aid asked whenever there is a movement on foot looking to bettering conditions of living in the community.

When Hugh reached the house where Professor Marvin lived, he found a little company assembled. Besides a number of the leading ladies identified with the league that had already done so much for the betterment of the town, there were three pastors present, the mayor of Oakvale, Doctor Kane, always to be relied on in things of this sort, and three influential citizens, who like many other people had begun to despair of any concerted movement directed to change the wretched conditions then prevailing.

There had been rambling talk going on. Evidently they had been waiting for the arrival of Mayor Strunk, whom Hugh had seen pass in.

Mr. Marvin now opened the meeting, which he said would be an informal affair.

"We know that every person in Oakvale who has taken the trouble to pay any attention to the way things are going," he began to say, "has been pained by the conditions prevailing. It is the consensus of opinion that something must be done, and that immediately, to better things. The only question that has kept this movement from crystallizing before has been the lack of cohesion; no one seemed to be able to present a proper plan that would unite all the different organizations interested in the good name of our town. And that is the object of this meeting to-night. We must all get together, and put our shoulders to the wheel."

Mayor Strunk, seeing that most eyes were immediately directed toward his quarter, got up to say his little piece. As usual, he was for procrastination. He had attended several other meetings during the winter just passed and always advised going slowly, so as not to make any mistake. The ladies had now

become indignant, and quite out of patience with him.

So when the suave politician commenced by saying that he realized as well as any one the need of something being done to improve living in Oakvale, and then went on to repeat the old advice not to be too hasty, because Rome was not built in a day, and all that sort of thing, there were quick glances passing around, and one lady had to be held down by main force, so eager was she to take the speaker to task, regardless of parliamentary rules.

Hardly had the mayor finished speaking, than she was on her feet, with flashing eyes. A ripple of applause greeted her taking the floor, because those present understood how fluently Mrs. Beverly could speak when her heart was full of a subject.

“Mayor Strunk advises delay, and delay,” she broke out with, indignantly. “I decline to agree with his policy. I have heard it advocated many times before, and nothing was ever done. The time to strike is when the iron is hot! Conditions are daily growing more unbearable. To-day our fair town has fallen from the position we once so proudly boasted. There are hidden snares for the feet of our young men and boys, about which the police must know. They should be wiped out pitilessly. There are numberless nuisances that are painful to the eyes and noses of sensitive people; these should be rigorously pursued with fines and other penalties until they are abated. If we have not laws on the books to cover all these offences let us see to it that they are immediately placed there. Then there is another crying evil that should be stopped without delay. I refer to several dangerous crossings where accidents have been known to happen, and at any day a terrible tragedy may stun the community. Listen while I tell you something that by the merest accident I witnessed myself, and only a few hours ago.”

Then, in graphic language, she went on to describe the affair at the crossing.

“Those little children were anxious to get home. They waited all of five minutes, and there was not the first chance given them to cross over, so stupid and selfish have the drivers and chauffeurs in Oakvale become, because the law is not strictly enforced. Then that one little chit, Anita Burns, bravely started across, eager to get to where an anxious mother waited for her. I saw a team of horses towering over her, and my heart literally stood in my mouth with fear.”

She had everybody intensely interested by this time. Hugh drew back a little for he feared she might mention him by name, and he shrank from publicity.

“Just in the nick of time I saw a boy dart forward,” continued the lady passionately. “He was lost to my sight for a brief period, and then when I thought I should faint with fear and suspense, I saw him appear on the opposite walk, carrying the child, uninjured, in his arms. He set her down on her feet, waved his hand to her, and then walked off with several of his scout chums, just as unconcerned, apparently, as though it might be nothing unusual; nor was it, my friends, for by this time we have all become accustomed to hear about—Hugh Hardin doing valiant things like that.”

She paused, because there was a wild outburst of cheers.

Hugh was as red as fire.

“If I had known that you saw that little happening, Mrs. Beverly, and meant to speak of it here, I might not have come over, though I certainly did want to hear what was said and done,” Hugh managed to stammer, at which there was another round of cheers accompanied by hand clapping.

“That is the best part of it all, Hugh,” said the lady. “The fellow who can do a clever thing like that and still shrink from publicity, doubly wins our admiration. But, my friends, I only mentioned the incident to show you how at any day there may take place a terrible tragedy at one of these unprotected crossings, where our innocent children have to pass over, going to and coming home from school. Now what shall we do about it? Must we wait until a fatality comes about before we combine all forces for good to crush these menaces to our peace and happiness? I say to you the hour has struck, and the women of this town are at last determined to sweep every obstacle out of their way in order to attain their end.”

Mayor Strunk threw up his hands.

“I surrender, ladies!” he hastened to exclaim, with the air of a man who knew how to get in out of the wet when it began raining. “Just as you say, the time for delay has passed, and from this night forward you can count on me as being with you, heart and soul. That little girl, Anita Burns, is my own grandchild, some of you may remember, and if anything had happened to her could I ever forgive myself? I guess it needed something like this to take the scales from my eyes.”

Everybody looked happy when they heard the mayor say this. Really, it had been his system of procrastination that had kept matters from reaching a climax long before. No one professed to understand just why he should have acted as he did, since his position as mayor carried no salary with it.

Professor Marvin later on called upon Hugh, as representing the scouts of Oakvale, to outline the idea he had in mind of having the boys made assistant police, with authority to wear badges, and power to order arrests in cases of emergency.

The mayor was somewhat dubious about the propriety of so radical a proceeding.

“It would be almost revolutionary,” he observed, “but then we happen to know how well Hugh can be trusted to keep his troop under strict control, and they have before this amply proven worthy of the citizens’ full trust. I shall call a meeting of the town council for to-morrow night, and as many of you as can, be present; I’d be glad of your backing when this scheme is thrashed out there.”

So at last the uplift movement had come to Oakvale, thanks in part to Hugh Hardin and his fellow scouts.

CHAPTER IV.

WAITING FOR THE GOOD NEWS.

“For home protection! That’s the slogan, fellows, Hugh has given us. We’re going to take our coats off, figuratively speaking, you understand, and purify the atmosphere around the place we live in.”

When Billy Worth gave utterance to these rather boastful remarks he was standing, with a bunch of other fellows in khaki, near the building where the town council, as called together by the mayor, was still in session.

Undoubtedly the fathers of Oakvale were having a warm discussion, since they had been at it for more than two hours. Indeed, the scouts had held their meeting in the room under the church, and made all their arrangements for carrying out their part of the programme, if everything went smoothly as they expected. A goodly number of the energetic lads had immediately, after the meeting was adjourned, decided to hurry around to ascertain what had happened at the council chamber, to which citizens were admitted to the capacity of the room, but the line was drawn at fellows under the voting age.

“Yes,” Jack Durham immediately added, with his characteristic energy, “Oakvale is going to take its periodical bath, so to speak. This time we’ll scrub to the bone, and make an extra clean job of it.”

“The impudent drivers and chauffeurs must be made to respect the law, if fines and imprisonment will do the trick!” asserted Dick Ballamy, who, for a wonder, seemed able to turn his thoughts from fishing to a subject that was of far more importance.

“Huh! Not only that,” Sam Winter burst out impetuously, “but those sneaking dives known as ‘speak-easies’ have got to be squelched. Some people don’t believe any liquor is being sold in Oakvale just because we’re called a dry town.

That fire the other day proved the foolishness of that joke, let me tell you, boys.”

“Just what it did!” declared Mark Trowbridge, who often lisped when he talked, an infirmity that was likely to follow him through life; “why, I thaw with my own eyeth two barrelth of bottleth half covered with a blanket, that had been carried from the cobbler’th thop.”

“Worse than that, even,” asserted Arthur Cameron in disgust. “I saw a man deliberately lift the cover, take out a bottle, and drain it there, with a dozen people standing around and laughing. Shows you how some of our laws are being made a joke. The police are aware of what’s going on, too; but they believe the sentiment of the town has heretofore been against enforcing certain statutes.”

“Well, they’re going to get a rude shock pretty soon, believe me,” said Billy. “Half an hour ago the mayor and Council sent for Chief Andy Wallis. He’s in there with them now, listening to the law being laid down. I reckon the Chief knows by this time that it’s going to be a clean town or we get a new head of police. The women have taken things in hand, and mean to purify the atmosphere, so that Oakvale boys and girls can breathe without being contaminated.”

“How fast the news spread all over town this morning,” observed Walter Osborne, the leader of the Hawk Patrol, a fine, manly looking fellow well liked by all his associates of the troop. “Why, my mother says they were talking of it in every store she visited, and father added that he was buttonholed half a dozen times by men who seemed chock full of the subject.”

“Old Doc Kane,” added Sam Winter, “carried the news wherever he went. He said it was going to be next door to a millennium for Oakvale, and that when the movement had exhausted its force he expected to have his business reduced one-half, because of the improved sanitary conditions that would prevail. That was one of the Doc’s little jokes.”

“He’s loaded to the muzzle with ammunition meant to boost the good cause along,” asserted another scout. “It’s among the mill people the good doctor does most of his missionary work. He knows how much a clean town means to fellows who haven’t comfortable homes to spend evenings in.”

“Of course, there’s no danger that the members of the town Council will try to

dodge the question again, as they've done so many times?" Jack Durham was saying.

Billy gave a scoffing laugh.

"Not much they will!" he ejaculated; "with that wide-awake Mrs. Marsh present, backed by a lady who can strike out from the shoulder like Mrs. Beverly."

"Besides," added Walter, "don't forget what Hugh told us about the sudden change of front on the part of Mayor Strunk. He saw a great light when he learned how his favorite little granddaughter had come near being run over by a team at that dangerous crossing of the three roads in town."

"Then there's another thing that's bound to cut some figure in the decision of the town Council to-night," said Billy. "Public sentiment has been aroused, and is at white heat. It seems as if everything combined to happen all at once, for this very afternoon old Mr. Merkle was knocked down by a speeding car that got away without anybody learning its number. He was badly hurt, and they took him to the hospital; but we've been told that the brave old chap, nearly eighty-five years of age, has sent a message of cheer to the ladies from his bed, telling them that he glories in being a martyr to the good cause."

"Every fellow take off his hat to old Mr. Merkle, for he's made of the stuff our Revolutionary fathers had in them when this country dared defy Great Britain," and as Walter Osborne said this, each scout raised his campaign hat with a touch of respect for the grand old hero lying on his bed of pain, yet able to think of the reform movement that was sweeping through the town.

"Here comes Hugh now!" called out a fellow on the outskirts of the group.

"And he looks as if he felt satisfied with the way things were going," another hastened to say.

The young assistant scout master quickly joined them. He was besieged by numerous questions. Indeed, so thick and fast did these come that Hugh laughed and threw up his hands, as though to shield himself from a fall of hailstones.

"Hold up, fellows," he told them; "what do you take me for? When you send them at me like that it makes me feel as the street urchin did who crawled into an empty sugar hogshead, and, seeing the riches around him, wished for a thousand

tongues. Give me a fair chance and I'll tell what little I've been able to pick up."

Accordingly they quieted down, though still pressing around Hugh, and hanging on his every word. Confidence in their leader is one of the highest attributes of praise scouts can show; and the members of Oakvale Troop felt this to the limit in the boy who had been elected to serve them in that capacity. So often had Hugh Hardin proved his ability to fill his exalted position that no one ever dreamed nowadays of contesting the leadership with him.

"I managed to interview Zack Huffman," explained Hugh, "who had been inside, but had to go home to his family because his wife is sick. He could stop only a minute or so to talk, but he told me the sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of carrying out the whole sweeping programme. The ladies have got in the saddle, so he said, and mean to ride at the head of the procession. You remember Zack is something of a scholar, and you ought to have heard him tell how they expect to beat the record of Hercules in cleaning the Augean stables."

"Hurrah for Zack!" cried one enthusiastic scout, for the boys were by this time so roused up over matters that they felt in the mood to cheer anybody and anything that favored their cause.

"Every now and then," continued Hugh, "I could hear applause from above there. I've got an idea Mrs. Beverly was talking. If she was, you can wager not a single member of the Council will dare vote against the mayor's programme after it's been announced. It's going to be carried with a whirl."

"If it is, we ought to burn a few barrels to celebrate to-night!" suggested Sam Winter, for such a programme always pleased him immensely.

"Hold on," Hugh instantly told him. "We want none of that sort of thing to-night. For once let's show that boys can be dignified. This is no Fourth of July affair. Some of the church people have even contemplated holding prayer meetings after the Council adjourns, if everything seems favorable, for their hearts are right in this uplift movement. It wouldn't seem just the right thing for scouts to be seen running like wild Indians all over town, and shouting their lungs out. We'll just go home in a quiet way, and get ready to commence business on Monday. Time enough for a jubilee when the ladies appoint a day for celebrating the victory. Just now we've got work, and plenty of it, ahead of us."

"Hugh, you're right!" asserted Arthur Cameron.

“Forget that I said it, Hugh!” begged the impulsive Sam, abashed by the argument advanced by the scout master, because his better sense told him that was the proper way of looking at it.

“Hey, there comes Chief Wallis out of the Council chamber!” called a voice, and immediately every fellow turned his eyes in that direction, anxious to decide for himself what the appearance of the head of the police force would indicate.

Chief Wallis walked straight toward them. His face was inscrutable, but as he reached the group of scouts, with Hugh at their head, he thrilled the boys by raising a hand in salute.

“Come in and see me on Monday, Hugh,” the Chief said, dramatically, “and we’ll fix it up about what sort of badge you and your fellow Assistant Police can wear. The women have carried the day, and Oakvale is going to be purged,” and as he strode on the boys broke into a series of stirring cheers.

CHAPTER V.

OAKVALE'S GREAT CLEAN-UP DAY.

According to the universal agreement, every pastor in Oakvale made some mention in his sermon on the following Sunday of the new movement that had been inaugurated by the better elements in the town. They urged every one of their flocks who wanted to see a cleaner Oakvale, morally and actually, to back up the committee.

It was the talk of the day wherever two or more persons came together, and there were places where the action of the town Council was either severely criticized or else condemned. No one need be told that as a rule these were the dens of vice that had been insulting the law and flaunting their brazen defiance in the teeth of the citizens.

Everybody seemed to be waiting with pent-up breath to see whether things would begin to move immediately Monday opened up.

By noon on Monday posters began to appear all over town, signed by the mayor, stating in concise, legal phrases how from that hour forward the law was going to be strictly enforced to the letter, and telling all about the plan to enlist the active co-operation of the Boy Scouts in helping to make a clean town.

After school that afternoon the fellows belonging to Oakvale Troop to the number of thirty marched to police headquarters. That three of the boys did not respond to roll call before marching through the streets, Hugh ascertained, was because in two instances they were sick at home with a mild attack of grippe, while the third boy was evidently kept away because he had an uncle who was believed to be the worst offender on the list, so that his folks were hardly in favor of appearing to go against their own flesh and blood.

But the boys, as they marched the full length of the main street, were cheered by

shoppers and shopkeepers and clerks, as well as others who crowded to the doors and windows. For it was well known what part Hugh and his fellow scouts were going to take in the redemption of Oakvale. Their previous success in ridding the town of cluttering rubbish gave people confidence in their ability to do even greater things.

The Chief had his men lined up in front of the headquarters. He believed in doing things according to rule, and meant to receive the scouts as fellow workers in the good cause.

To hear the speech Chief Wallis made the new Assistant Police any one would have believed his heart had always been in the laudable enterprise of trying to clean up the dives, and protect the dangerous crossings. Perhaps it had, but the Chief being a politician dared not show his hand so long as he felt that public sentiment was against any change of policy. He knew better now. He had heard the ringing words that fell from Mrs. Beverly's lips, which speech, according to all accounts, eclipsed any oration ever delivered in the town hall; the Chief was fully enlisted in the cause.

"We will have official badges made without delay for each and every member of the Assistant Police," he told the listening boys, who interrupted his speech with frequent cheers. "In the meanwhile, as the posters issued by His Honor the Mayor state, your regular scout emblem will be badge enough, and must be respected everywhere within the limits of this town. Possibly some people will at first be inclined to treat your show of authority as a joke, and laugh at any orders you may issue. After a few of them have been arrested by my regular officers, and either fined or placed in jail for some days, they will have their eyes opened."

Then the Chief went on to explain just what their line of work would consist of, and where they must draw the line. Certain duties they could proceed to carry out, but the regular officers would be used to make most arrests, especially where there was any danger involved.

"You understand," he told them, "it is not intended that the boys operating with this movement are going to become spies, to find out what their neighbors may be doing, but we expect you to keep your eyes open to discover any glaring infraction of the laws, as mentioned in that poster, and your leader will thereupon report any such discovery at headquarters, from where it will be

attended to.”

He then earnestly besought them to be on their dignity, and guard against any unnecessary show of being conceited, or too proud of their new positions.

“Go about your work without any display of authority. People will begin by sneering at you, but if you do your duty faithfully they will soon come to respect your badge. Never forget that the best people of the community are behind you in all you may attempt. Hugh, we look to you to be a safe guide for your followers, and the mayor told me to inform you that he expects every scout to do his part manfully. That’s about all I have to say to you to-day, though from time to time I expect to confer with your leader, and lay out new plans. I salute you all again as members in full standing of the Police Force of Oakvale.”

Hugh had his plans pretty well laid out, though everything could not be accomplished at once. He had selected certain members of the troop for duty at the dangerous crossings, beginning on the very next morning. In doing this, Hugh had used much discretion, for he expected that there would be more or less trouble, since drivers and chauffeurs had become so accustomed to having their own way that they would object strenuously to any interference.

It turned out, however, that Chief Wallis foresaw this very source of trouble, and had delegated several officers to stand near by in readiness to arrest the first driver who failed to pull up when a scout raised his white-gloved hand as an order for him to do so.

That was a pretty warm day in sections at police headquarters. Arrests came in quick succession, as though a regular scheme had been arranged to make the new order a laughing-stock. But the mayor had a magistrate ready, and those who were brought in charged with breaking the traffic rules, as well as in some cases resisting an officer had heavy fines imposed upon them, with the alternative of several days in the lockup if they refused to settle.

It was astonishing how quickly the news went around that the mayor actually meant to stand by the ladies and the scouts in the crusade. For the first time that evening in many moons, every questionable and shady resort about Oakvale was closed as tight as a drum, as Billy Worth explained it, after a walk about town.

“Why,” he told Hugh, with glistening eyes, “you can see the fellows who used to spend most of their time in those places standing on the street corners watching

to see what next is going to happen. They look dazed and glum, I tell you; yes, and ugly, too, because their business is going to be all busted up. They're telling each other that the way things are starting in it looks like more than just a joke."

"“A new broom sweeps clean!”” quoted Hugh. “I never doubted but what once the people of this town woke up it could be done, and in a hurry. The only question is how long will it last? A whole lot of persons will soon get tired of the novelty, and public sentiment may swing around to indifference again. That is what we have to fear more than anything else. Those bad men will just wait for things to take a change, and as scouts we've got to see to it that the enthusiasm never dies out.”

After an exciting day, Hugh felt pretty tired that Monday evening. He had received special reports from all the scouts who had been on duty. These covered a multitude of things from difficulties at the crossings when traffic was held up at such times as the smaller children were going to and from school, to infractions of the laws of cleanliness and health persisted in by certain citizens who ought to have known better.

Hugh carefully read every one of these reports, and they were numerous, for the boys had been extremely vigilant, as if to prove their right to be called Auxiliary Police. Hugh used his own discretion about keeping some of these reports. A few he smiled at, and made a mental note to warn the writer that it was not intended to enter into private property in order to spy around, but that the complaints must be of such things as offended the public eye or ear or nose; after which he tore these up.

The others he carefully filed with a good deal of satisfaction, to be later on submitted to Chief Wallis, after copies had been taken for the scout records. On the whole, Hugh believed the boys had made good that day, despite all the novelty of the thing, and the troubles they had met with. As time passed on and people came more and more to recognize them as a part of the regular system for carrying out the laws that were upon the books, much of this friction would die away, and the wheels of machinery could be expected to move more smoothly.

Hugh, feeling that he must not neglect his studies on account of this outside occupation, had just taken out his books, and was about to settle down to an hour or so of “grind,” when he heard the doorbell ring.

Then he caught a familiar voice asking if he were at home. It was Tom Sherwood, stationed that day at the most dangerous crossing in all Oakvale, and who Hugh understood, from all accounts, had acquitted himself splendidly.

The sound of Tom's voice suddenly recalled to Hugh's mind the fact that he had promised to help the other. It had been utterly impossible for Hugh to attempt anything along the lines he had suggested, concerning an interview with Benjy Sherwood, for his day had been crammed full of duties, great and small.

But when Tom burst into his room impetuously Hugh could see from his face that the other had more bad news to communicate.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROMISE OF A SCOUT.

“Hello, Tom! Glad to have you drop around to see me!” was the friendly and cheery salute of the scout master, as he nodded to the newcomer.

Boys do not usually wait on ceremony when visiting, so Tom, without bothering to be asked to take a seat, dropped into an easy-chair.

Like most fellows of his age, Hugh had his room fitted up in as cozy a fashion as suited his fancy. There were the customary college flags decorating the walls, and some well-selected pictures that showed the bent of Hugh’s mind toward art, a small matter, perhaps, in the opinion of most people, but of moment with any one really desirous of knowing the nature of the boy who lives and sleeps inside those walls.

One thing Hugh had noticed particularly. This was the exceeding great care his guest took in making sure that he had properly closed the door after him when entering the room. As a rule, Tom was inclined to be more or less careless in this respect, being a breezy sort of a chap. Hugh guessed that there might be a reason for this unusual caution, and it so proved.

“Hugh, it’s getting worse all the time!” was the first remark the newcomer made, and in a low voice, at that, as if he did not by any chance want to be overheard by others in the adjoining room.

Hugh could easily guess what those depressing words meant. If he had entertained any sort of doubt, the sigh that followed would have dispelled them. Tom was in deeper trouble than ever, and that active younger brother of his, Benjy, was undoubtedly the cause.

“What’s Benjy been doing now, Tom?” he asked, in as soothing a voice as he

could summon to his aid.

Tom scratched his head, as though a trifle puzzled to know just how to begin.

“To tell you the truth, Hugh, I don’t know what he is after, but he’s doing some mighty queer stunts. I never knew him to try to steal before.”

“Oh, come, that’s a pretty hard word to use, Tom!” remonstrated the scout master, trying to appear unbelieving, although he had felt a little chill on hearing Tom say what he did.

Poor Tom shook his head as if very downcast.

“You don’t know how much it knocks me to even suspect such a thing, Hugh,” he presently managed to say, and there was a plain tremor to his voice, usually so robust and strong. “In spite of his headstrong ways, Benjy has always been such a lovable fellow that—well, I’d go through fire and water for him if I could do him any good.”

“I’m sure you would,” ventured Hugh, consolingly, as the other boy stopped, to gulp several times, as though nearly choking with emotion.

“Ever since he started going with the set that trains with the newcomer in Oakvale, Park Norris,” commenced Tom, “Benjy seems to have changed ever so much, and all for the worse. It worries me heaps, and I don’t know how I’m to get him back again. He seems to listen, with a curl to his lip, whenever I speak about it, and I’m sure I try to act the big brother to him, with my arm about his shoulders.”

“Tell me what’s happened since I saw you last, Tom,” urged the scout master, desirous of getting at the “meat in the cocoanut” as quickly as possible, for he had an hour or so to put in at studying, and, besides, was pretty tired after a strenuous day.

“I will, Hugh. That was what brought me here to see you. When we talked matters over before, you promised to help me.”

“I repeat that promise, Tom. As the temporary head of the troop, I could do no less; and as your old chum I’d go far out of my way to give a helping hand to Tom Sherwood.”

The other heaved a sigh, and his eyes glistened with a sudden moisture.

“Thank you, Hugh,” he managed to say, half steadily. “I knew I could depend on you. I wanted to keep these things from our mother as long as I could. She doesn’t suspect anything like the truth, for I heard her say only the other day when Benjy had been rather irritable that she feared he must be unwell, and perhaps she ought to have Doctor Kane drop in to look him over.”

“There may be a little truth in that, Tom, don’t you know!” suggested Hugh, but the other boy shook his head ominously in the negative.

“I’d like to believe it, Hugh,” he said. “It would be only a matter of a dose of calomel or some other medicine that old Doc Kane likes to give, and my brother would be himself again. But there’s something more than that the matter. However, I said I’d start in and tell what happened, and so here goes, Hugh.”

“Please get to the facts as soon as you can, Tom,” requested the other.

“It happened this very afternoon,” began Tom. “I came home, and started up to my room to get something or other, when in the glass at the end of the hall I happened to see something move through the open door. You know, Hugh, I have a little room all my own at our house, and Benjy’s is at the other end of the hall. When I saw that it was my brother in my room I was surprised, for of late he hasn’t bothered dropping in to visit with me like he used to be so fond of doing.

“Well, to make a long story short, Hugh, something tempted me to move softly along the hall and look in past the partly open door. Hugh, would you believe me, I was shocked to see Benjy, whom I once believed the soul of honor, actually rummaging in my trunk.”

“Do you keep your trunk locked?” asked Hugh quickly.

“Not as a rule,” replied Tom, “unless I happen to have something in it I don’t want a servant to see, or some Christmas presents I’ve hid away. I guess it wasn’t locked to-day, in fact, I know it wasn’t.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear that,” said the scout master, really relieved. “Younger brothers often think they have a right to rummage when the notion strikes them, I understand. Why should you think it so strange, Tom?”

“Perhaps I wouldn’t have felt so badly about it some time ago,” admitted Tom; “but so many suspicious things have happened, you see, to make me think Benjy is going along the fast road. There was his taking that money from his savings bank, and answering me so impudently when I asked him what he was spending it for, instead of waiting till the Fourth of July. Hugh, I keep my own savings bank lying in my trunk, along with a lot of other stuff!”

“Do you think he meant to open that, and extract some of the contents?” asked Hugh, feeling uncomfortably chilly at the thought.

“I’d hate to say what terrible thoughts chased through my brain when I saw him turning things upside down as though he couldn’t find what he was looking for,” the grieved Tom went on to remark.

“What did you do?” inquired Hugh.

“The first thing I thought of doing was to step right in and ask him what he meant by getting in my trunk while I was away. But somehow, Hugh, I just couldn’t bring myself to do that, so I slipped down to the head of the stairs, and then started to whistle, and make a noise with my feet, as if I might be coming up from the lower floor.”

“Yes,” said Hugh, greatly interested, as Tom paused to gulp again.

“When I stepped into my room, Benjy had managed to get the trunk closed, for I had heard the lid bang down. He was going around looking up at the walls in the most innocent way possible, and as soon as I came in he asked me if I would mind lending him my old tennis racquet for a little while.”

“Well, perhaps he wanted to have a game with some of the fellows over on the courts,” explained Hugh. “I noticed that several sets were on this afternoon for the first time this season. You were always a crackerjack at tennis, Tom, and it may run in the blood with all the Sherwoods.”

“That’s just where the trouble comes in, Hugh. Benjy never cared a red cent for playing, though I often wanted him to take a hand. No, I’m afraid that was just a sudden idea that flashed into his head, so that I wouldn’t think it strange that I should find him prowling in my room. Besides, he was as red as a beet when he asked me that simple question, and mother would never have thought he looked pale and sick if she had only seen him *then*.”

“You didn’t say anything to him, of course, Tom?”

“If you mean accuse him in any way, Hugh, certainly not,” came the ready answer. “To tell you the truth, my heart was just too full and too sore to think of scolding, or anything like that. I stepped over to where my old racquet stood behind the door, for I meant to have it restrung this spring, as it was getting in poor shape at the close of last season; and I handed it to Benjy, trying to look natural, too. I’m afraid, though, he must have seen something queer in my face, for I noticed he gave me a quick stare just as he took the racquet and hurried off, with muttered thanks.”

Hugh pondered over the matter. He hardly knew what to say. It might be a very innocent thing, on the part of Benjy. Again, there was a chance that the worst Tom feared might be only too true.

Hugh did not like the new boy in town, Park Norris. He had too much spending money for his own good, and it was said that his influence was not of the best upon several fellows who seemed to be fascinated by his manner and ways.

“I’ll tell you what, Tom,” the scout master presently remarked seriously, “leave this matter with me, and I promise you I’ll take it up very soon. I’ll try and learn how much Benjy is under the influence of Park Norris, and then find out if I can’t win his confidence. I seem to have a pretty good knack that way; at least, fellows tell me so, and I glory in it, too.”

“Oh, I’m sure that if only you could get Benjy to promise to break off with the set he’s been running with, Hugh, it would come out all right. It’s the cigarette and card habit I’m most afraid of. He’s such a lovable boy, you know, and I guess he is more easily led than I. So Park Norris has managed to get a grip on him. I don’t know of a single fellow who could win him back to his old way of living as well as you.”

“I give you my promise, Tom, remember, and I think I have the reputation of always keeping my word. I’ll do everything I can to make Benjy see that he’s on the wrong track. Will that satisfy you, old fellow?”

Tom suddenly clutched his friend’s hand and squeezed it convulsively.

“Oh, thank you, Hugh, thank you ever so much!” he went on to say, trying to restrain his emotion. “I’ve got such confidence in your way of doing things that

somehow I seem to believe it's just bound to come out all right, now that you're going to go up against the evil influence of that Park Norris. Benjy will give in if he's approached in the right spirit, and nobody knows how better to do that than you."

"Try and keep on feeling that way, Tom," advised the other, as his visitor picked up his hat preparatory to leaving. "Above all things don't let Benjy see that you suspect him. Be particularly kind to him. Every time you do things for him it's going to be a fresh stab at his conscience, you know. In the end it'll make my job the easier. That's all there is to do. Leave the rest to me, Tom."

And the look of brimming gratitude which Tom Sherwood gave his chum spoke more eloquently than any words he could have uttered would have done. When he went forth again into the night air his brain was calmed by the thought that Hugh had again promised to help him; and past experiences and observation told Tom that the young scout master nearly always did everything he attempted.

Hugh, on his part, had hard work keeping his mind on his studies the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE "UPLIFT" WORKED.

As the days went by, every one became convinced that a great change, and for the better, had come upon Oakvale. The scouts had entered upon their share in the uplift with boyish enthusiasm. They had already, most of them, seen service along somewhat similar lines, and felt as though they were veterans. Besides, they were constantly encouraged by the kind words and praise of the women whose weighty influence was back of the movement to encourage everything that was for the betterment of conditions in and around Oakvale, so as to make it a model town for clean living.

There were mistakes, plenty of them, but the scouts learned from experience, and it might be noticed that the same fellow seldom if ever committed the same blunder.

As the days went by, they became more and more proficient in their tasks, earning hearty praise from all those who were so deeply interested in the work. After a few drivers and chauffeurs had been fined, and some of them locked up for a spell, they began to realize that the scouts were not to be reckoned with as a big joke. When a boy, in the now respected khaki, standing in the middle of the street at that dangerous crossing, held up his white-gloved hand, traffic came to a sudden stop, and there was safe passage across for the groups of small children on the way to and from school.

It only delayed things for a minute at the most, but precious young lives were rendered safe from accident. Those boys who were given this privilege in regular rotation showed by their manner that they felt proud to fulfill their duties; nor did they in any instance abuse the privilege their badges gave them above their fellows.

What had at first seemed like a lark in the eyes of other boys not members of the

troop presently became a serious matter. When some of them started to annoy members of the new Auxiliary Police they were soon startled by a visit at their homes by the stern Chief himself, who warned their folks that a second offense would mean severe punishment. Possibly some of those parents took it upon themselves to start operations by selecting a nice stout switch and keeping it in view.

However, gradually order came out of chaos. Hugh worked faithfully trying to remedy whatever proved to be faulty, and, of course, there were numberless things that constantly required attention.

Those were busy days for the regular police, and it kept them on the go, warning offenders against the sanitary code that affairs must be speedily altered; for those wide-awake eyes of the thirty scouts on duty all the time seemed to discover a myriad of things that were not being conducted according to law, and were a disgrace to any decent community.

The mayor was now heart and soul in the work. He realized that he had the backing of the solid people of the town, as well as all the church members, and the women besides.

Once Oakvale had experienced the delight of being really clean it would require an upheaval to make them change back to old conditions. There was an element, however, as is always the case in every community, that looked upon these happenings with more or less angry mutterings and frowns, for with the change had passed their source of gain and livelihood. They knew better than to talk openly against the new order of things, but whenever and wherever the opportunity arose they would try to excite derision for the “uplift” movement.

It seemed as though these people who loved darkness rather than light felt especially sore toward Hugh Hardin and his scouts. They believed that somehow the khaki boys were the backbone of the whole business, as they were the ones whose eyes detected offenses and reported the same to headquarters every day. With a score and a half of bright lads constantly on the scent it was difficult for anything unlawful to escape notice.

Without the help given by Hugh and his scouts the movement could never have attained such wonderful success from the beginning—that was as good as acknowledged by almost every one on both sides. It was not singular then that

some of the lower elements, finding themselves hedged about with so many difficulties in gaining a livelihood in such a spick-and-span town, should get their heads together with the object of devising some shrewd method by means of which the old conditions might be brought back again.

Plainly then to do this the easiest way would be to conjure up some means whereby the new order of things would be brought into contempt. Hugh himself had more than once been given obscure threats that unless he relaxed his vigilance and shut his eyes to certain things if they started up again, he would find himself in a peck of trouble.

Not once did the boy flinch, even though he felt that some of these men were of a desperate nature, and would descend to almost any mean depths when their former lawless habits were interfered with. Hugh consulted with the minister, Mr. Dobbs, and the mayor of Oakvale, both of whom promised to stand by the scouts through any difficulty.

These things aroused the women greatly when they heard of them. Plainly the enemies of the community were becoming alarmed, thinking they had been cast out for good. If conditions did not soon improve there would have to be considerable emigration to other communities that did not have ambitions to merit the name of "Spotless Town." But it was believed that before they yielded up the fight these people would very likely make one last great effort to turn the tables on the reformers.

They had been engaging legal talent in Oakvale to look up the law and ascertain whether the mayor had not overstepped his authority when he ordered certain resorts closed where young fellows had been in the habit of congregating to play pool. Although no actual proof had as yet been produced, it was widely understood that other games far less innocent had also been played there, and that indeed liquor could be procured on the premises by those who "knew the ropes."

But there were other lawyers on the side of the mayor, backed by the women and the reform element. They made certain that things were kept within the bounds granted by the law. Then the town Council, now wholly committed to the new order of things, announced themselves ready to pass any additional law necessary to continue things as they were.

A week later and Hugh began to breathe easier. He felt that matters had advanced so far that they could plume themselves on making the movement a success. He was every day hoping to hear that the elements they had cause to fear were commencing to leave town. As long as they continued to abide in Oakvale the danger was that of a snake “scotched, not killed,” and liable to come to life again at any time.

All this while he had not found a good chance to keep his promise to Tom Sherwood, mostly on account of the press of business. With so many things depending on him while acting in the place of Lieutenant Denmead, still absent from home, as well as his studying for the spring examinations, Hugh certainly had his hands full.

But whenever he happened to meet Tom, and saw that look of entreaty on the other’s face, Hugh took himself to task for not finding time to enter upon the little side campaign for the redemption of Benjy Sherwood.

So far as he knew, the latter did not seem to be in the company of the Norris boy on the various occasions when Hugh had noticed the latter on the street. That was no reason, however, that Benjy did not seek his society at other times, and perhaps visit at Park’s house, where possibly cards were not prohibited as a source of boyish amusement.

“I’m going to start something doing in that direction by to-morrow,” Hugh was telling himself as he walked toward home one afternoon, after making a report to the Chief and receiving the usual congratulations on his proficiency.

It was the sight of Benjy across the way that caused him to say that, for the other had come out of the store where all sorts of games, from baseball goods and skates down to playing cards, were for sale and exhibited in the windows.

It seemed to Hugh, although he admitted that perhaps his imagination made him think so, that Benjy Sherwood glanced to the right and left as he came out, as a fellow might who was trying to hide something, or else felt conscience stricken. He noticed that the other was also trying to keep a package he carried close to his body as he walked on.

Suddenly Hugh saw Benjy turn and hurry down a side street, almost running, in fact. He hardly knew what to make of this until, chancing to look further along, he discovered Tom Sherwood in sight. It hardly seemed likely that the other had

noticed his younger brother's very suspicious action in wanting to elude him.

Hugh felt a strange fascination in connection with the matter. It was growing more interesting than ever, and more mysterious, he admitted. What had Benjy been doing in that store that he should dislike to have his brother see him, and actually turn and slink away?

"I'll know something about this before a great while," Hugh was telling himself as he walked slowly on, trying to figure out what his best plan of campaign might be under the circumstances. As a wise scout he always tried to make ample preparations before starting in on a game.

As once before, Hugh had gotten almost within sight of his home fence when he heard his name called from the rear. It was not Tom Sherwood this time who came running after him, but Ralph Kenyon.

Ralph had always been a great favorite of Hugh's. There was a time when the other had been making money trapping small fur-bearing animals up above Oakvale, and proving himself quite a woodsman, in so far as having a knowledge of the habits of these four-footed forest denizens went.

That was before Ralph became interested in the scouts and finally joined the troop. He could not be induced to set a single cruel steel trap now, because he looked at things in an entirely different light from those other days. But he was without a peer in the whole troop when it came to a question of following a trail, or being able to understand what the thousand-and-one little signs in the woods stood for.

Ralph looked excited, Hugh saw, as the other drew near, and the first thing the scout master thought the cause to be some fresh insult from the rough element in town opposed to the new conditions.

Hugh was ready to turn right-about face and go back to the office of the Chief, if Ralph's complaint seemed serious enough to warrant it. He was determined that the work so well begun should not be put back by any underhand methods.

Ralph soon came up, gulping in big draughts of air. His face was red, and what seemed to be a look of indignation, according to Hugh's mind, could be seen there.

“Something got twisted and needs straightening out, eh, Ralph?” asked the scout master pleasantly.

“Worse than that, I’m afraid, Hugh,” replied Ralph.

“None of the boys hurt, I hope?” quickly inquired Hugh, for the one thing he had been dreading was an open rupture between the rival forces in town, with stones flying and a near-riot in the process of forming.

“Well, not yet, Hugh, but if things keep on there’s going to be the dickens to pay,” panted Ralph, leaning against the fence as he spoke. “Fact is, those gamblers and law breakers have got desperate, and they’ve schemed to put us scouts in a bad hole, so the mayor will have to discharge us and start the whole uplift game tumbling in the soup; that’s what makes me look so scared like, Hugh!”

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE USE FOR WOODCRAFT KNOWLEDGE.

“What do you mean by putting us scouts in a bad hole, Ralph?” asked Hugh, quickly, for what the other boy had said startled him.

Ralph glanced hurriedly about, as though to make absolutely certain that no eavesdroppers were near by to overhear what he said. Then he drew closer to Hugh and assumed a most mysterious manner that could not help having an effect upon the surprised scout chief.

“Oh! they’re as mad as hops, let me tell you, Hugh,” Ralph commenced.

“Of course you mean, Ralph, those fellows who were hurt when we put the lid tight on Oakvale, and stopped their sneaky business, whatever it may have been?”

“Yes, and they’ve got together and mean to fight back, that’s how it stands now, Hugh,” he was told.

“We knew they had employed lawyers and were meaning to do everything they could to get the mayor’s acts called unconstitutional,” Hugh remarked.

“Oh! they’ve made up their minds, I guess,” Ralph continued hastily, “that when it comes to a show-down of law they haven’t got a chance to win out. Hugh, let me tell you again some of that bunch are the most desperate men going. Why, nobody would ever have believed we had such monsters here in little old Oakvale.”

“Whew! you’re going pretty strong when you use a word like that, Ralph!”

“They deserve it every time, I tell you,” persisted the other. “What else would you call men who even scheme to have a store in this town robbed, and then fix

it so that marked bills or pieces of jewelry will be found in the pockets of certain scouts, you among the number?”

Hugh stared hard at Ralph as though he could hardly believe his ears.

“You haven’t been dreaming that, have you, Ralph?” he finally asked, as he took hold of the other’s sleeve and drew him around so that he could look straight into Ralph’s eyes, which, however, did not waver before his gaze.

“Not much I haven’t, Hugh,” he was told like a flash. “I give you my word of honor I heard that very scheme spoken of by three of the leading spirits in this fight against a clean town—Gaffney, who used to run that poolroom; Slimmons, the retired boxer, who used to be athletic trainer at the schools before somehow he took to drinking so heavy they had to drop him (and he’s hung around Gaffney’s place ever since trying to pick up some sort of living giving boxing lessons, etc.). There was a third man present, but he doesn’t really live in town. I suspect he’s been interested on the quiet in dodging the law here by supplying shady resorts with booze, and is losing money as long as they stay shut up.”

“Where did all this take place, tell me, Ralph?”

“Listen then, Hugh. I happened to be coming across lots down at the bowling alley corner when I saw those three men dodge into the place. You know it’s been closed to play ever since they found things were going on there that had no business in Oakvale. Well, I thought there was something queer about the way those three men acted before they dodged in, and my old sense of investigation at once began to urge me to take a peek and see what they might be up to. If any sort of game was going on, the police ought to know, you understand, Hugh?”

“Yes, and you were acting within your rights as a member of the regular police force, in figuring on doing so,” the other assured him.

Ralph smiled grimly as though pleased to receive that reassurance from the one in whom he placed unlimited confidence.

“Well, it was as easy as falling off a log for me to discover a window that I could crawl through,” Ralph went on to say, “and nobody saw me do it either. I haven’t been watching mink, otter, and foxes pull off their sly tricks without learning a thing or two. So once I got inside the old building it wasn’t much of a job to find where they were sitting, jabbering away like everything, in low voices, as if they

didn't want to be heard outside.

“Hugh, I couldn't begin to repeat what I heard. All of them were excited, and in dead earnest, too. Each one had suggestions to make that sometimes made my blood run cold. Their well-paying business has been closed up, you see, and that's what makes them so bent on striking a blow to end this silly 'racket,' as they contemptuously call the uplift movement.

“And, Hugh, just as I said in the beginning, they're actually planning to have a robbery committed, and manage it so that some of the stuff that's taken will be found on a number of the scouts. Just how this is to be done they hadn't fully settled; but it's all going to be fixed this very night, so that before another forty-eight hours have passed the dirty game can be worked. Why, I never dreamed so dreadful a thing would come slap up against us scouts. They want the people of Oakvale to suspect us of being common, every-day thieves.”

“Don't worry, Ralph,” said Hugh, firmly. “I don't believe the game could have been carried out successfully at any time, even if none of us so much as suspected a thing. Now that you've warned us, why, it's bound to fall flat. Mayor Strunk and the women of this town know the scouts too well to ever believe they'd disgrace their uniforms and honor badges by stealing.”

“Do you know, Hugh, while I lay there straining my ears like everything so's not to lose much of what those plotters said, I was thinking what a bully thing it would be if the scouts could turn the tables on 'em.”

“You mean, Ralph, fix things so the fellows who actually did the robbery would be nabbed in the act—with the goods on—before they found a chance to deposit any of the plunder in the pockets of the scouts, or at their homes, where it would be found when a search started?”

“That's what I had in mind,” confessed the other, eagerly.

“It would be just what they deserved,” declared Hugh, “and what some folks would call retribution. We would save ourselves a whole lot of trouble and explanations, and at the same time might get rid of an undesirable bunch of crooked people that Oakvale never would miss.”

“Of course you understand, Hugh, that I was so worked up by what I managed to hear, I felt nervous about staying too long, for fear those men found me out. I tell

you they're mad enough to do almost anything to us scouts. So I concluded it would be wise to creep back, and get out of that same window again before anything happened to me. This I proceeded to do, and say, I breathed free again when I found myself under the blue sky once more."

"The last you saw of them they were still sitting in the old bowling alley place talking things over, eh, Ralph?"

"Yes, and figuring on how soon they could do that nasty job, too, Hugh. From all I heard they won't let the grass grow under their feet before getting things moving."

"If only we knew whose store was to be robbed we would have something to work on," suggested the scout leader, invitingly.

"Oh! I think I know that much even now," admitted Ralph. "They seemed to be talking about the easiest way to get in, and I heard them mention old Mr. Ainslee several times, as if it was to be his jewelry store."

Hugh would not have been human if he had not felt a chilling sensation pass over him upon learning to what extreme lengths the enemies of reform were willing to go in order to accomplish their purpose. This was to upset the prevailing conditions, and put the town back into the old rut that was winked at by the police and authorities, it being impolitic to notice them too closely.

His determination was immediately taken, for Hugh could often reach a conclusion as speedily as on other occasions he took time to make up his mind.

"Ralph, I was headed for home when you stopped me," he went on to explain, "but after hearing what you've just said, I want to have Mr. Dobbs and the mayor know what those desperate men are thinking of doing. Would you mind coming with me and repeating your story to them?"

"Not a bit, Hugh; fact is, I expected that you would ask me to do so, and I'd made up my mind what to say. Sure, I'll go along, and repeat every word."

Accordingly the pair trudged their way to the parsonage, and were fortunate enough to find the minister in his study. Mr. Dobbs was a venerable man who always took a great interest in all the activities of the Oakvale boys. The scouts had no more sincere friend and advocate than he proved to be, even when the

organization had been young, and much doubt had been expressed among the better people of the town as to the wisdom of allowing such a movement to crystallize.

He greeted the boys with his customary warmth.

“I’m very glad to have you drop in on me this way,” he told them. “If it is in search of any advice or other assistance, I shall be glad to know what I can do for boys I think so highly of. Tell me what your errand is this time, Hugh, my son.”

Of course the parson was highly indignant when he heard to what actual depths of depravity some of those men were willing to descend in order to undo the work of the loyal scouts, and the better elements among the residents of Oakvale.

“It all goes to prove how fearfully lax we had become here,” he observed after Ralph had told all he knew. “It also shows what a crying necessity for a radical cleaning-up movement there must have been when such criminal elements, working to undermine the characters of our young men and boys, as these, could effect a lodgment in our town. It was high time we woke up and took our coats off for business. Ralph, I want to thank you in the name of every respectable woman and mother in Oakvale for what you have discovered this day. ‘Forewarned is forearmed,’ they say, and before we are through with Gaffney, Slimmons and Company, they will realize that they have been up against a threshing machine.”

Hugh liked to hear the old minister talk like that, for he understood that Mr. Dobbs was really a Civil War veteran, and in the old days had once been known as the “Fighting Parson.” If those unruly men fancied that because he was a shepherd of a flock he would not fight to save his pet lambs from the devouring wolves they made the greatest mistake of their whole lives.

So Mr. Dobbs quickly got the mayor on the wire and asked him to come over to the parsonage without a moment’s delay; also to fetch Doctor Kane along with him if he could possibly do so.

“I’ve got something to communicate that will give you an electric shock, if that hint will cause you to speed your car any the faster, Mr. Mayor,” the boys heard the minister say in conclusion.

It was not a great while before they arrived, for apparently the mayor had either met Doctor Kane on the street or managed to find him at his house. Then once more Ralph was influenced to tell his startling story. He had deeply interested listeners. Hugh could see the mayor gritting his teeth as he had a way of doing when thoroughly aroused.

“These two wide-awake scouts have suggested,” said Mr. Dobbs, after everything had been told, “that we keep very quiet about this discovery, and lay a trap so that when the robbery is actually attempted we may arrest those who are implicated. If they are caught in the act, before they can have any opportunity to place the blame on any one else, we will have no trouble of ridding our town of unworthy citizens. Mr. Mayor, it rests with you to decide.”

“Nothing would please me better!” exclaimed the mayor, strenuously. “Before we go into details with regard to any plan I want to thank these brave boys from the bottom of my heart on account of what the scouts have done and are doing to purge Oakvale of every element that stands, as a blot on a town’s fair name.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE GOAL IN SIGHT.

It was fine of the mayor to say that. Had the women who had labored so long and so arduously in order to accomplish this end overheard what he remarked, they might have whispered among themselves that it was a great pity Mr. Strunk could not have reached the desired resolution many months previously.

But then “better late than never,” and if his eyes were now opened to the enormity of the offenses that had previously been winked at as unavoidable in a bustling community of Oakvale’s size and rapid growth, there was good hope of the future.

Before Hugh and Ralph left the parsonage to hurry home to supper they had heard the whole thing thrashed out, and even found their opinions asked by the trio of deeply interested gentlemen.

A plan was fairly well arranged that would serve as a trap, for from what Ralph had caught, the conspirators would not be in position to attempt the daring robbery until then. In fact, as Ralph very well understood, it was actually Hugh who proposed the idea upon which the minister, Doctor Kane and the mayor finally settled as promising the best results. But then Ralph saw nothing strange about that, for as a member of the scouts he was accustomed to have Hugh Hardin naturally take the lead in almost everything.

Ralph was greatly pleased. He considered, and rightly, too, Hugh told him, that once again his knowledge of woodcraft and the Indian art of creeping up close to an enemy’s camp had proved of value to the cause he represented. Many fellows similarly situated, even if they had thought to make the attempt, might have bungled, and only brought down some sort of chastisement on their own heads for their temerity.

It was to remain a dead secret; even the rest of the scouts would not be told why Hugh ordered them to be at their place of meeting on the following night, prepared to have a number of the stoutest and most adept chosen for a special mission.

The mayor promised to see Chief Wallis on the following morning and get him interested in the matter, so that he and several of his men could have a hand in trapping the thieves. Just as likely as not these men would be in a desperate mood, and liable to show fight when they realized how completely the tables had been turned upon them. Hence it was deemed wise to have some of the regulars on the police force handy in order to assist the scouts make the arrests.

No doubt the home folks at the Hardin and Kenyon domiciles must have thought the boys were unusually serious all that evening, perhaps absent-minded, for often they would start when spoken to suddenly, as though wrapped up in some far-away subject.

However, as it was known that their hearts were concerned in the successful carrying out of the cleaning up of Oakvale, allowances were made for them. Fond mothers, though, may have found themselves wondering if it were really wise to allow such weights to rest upon young shoulders.

Another day came around, and its duties were taken up by the scouts with their accustomed alacrity. Every fellow seemed to vie with his mates in doing his share of the work in a way that would allow of no fault finding. There was indeed what might be called a healthy rivalry among the scouts, to see who could command the highest number of clean scores; for Hugh had arranged matters in the shape of a contest, to make it more interesting.

The opposition had not yet died out, for when men have fallen into certain bad habits that become as second nature, it is most difficult to break the bonds binding them.

True, the drivers and chauffeurs in and about Oakvale had by degrees become accustomed to the new order of things, which was moving along as smoothly as clockwork. They found there was absolutely no need of any friction, and that while occasionally held up by the amateur "traffic cop" in order to allow a safe passage for a squad of school children, they really lost little or no time. Besides, a vast amount of argument and hard words was saved by this orderly way of

running things at congested crossings.

Already the new system had borne fruit, for the railway company, while not compelled to do so by any town ordinance, doubtless falling in with the general scheme of uplift, stationed a flagman at the perilous crossing, who would be on duty from six in the morning until sundown.

Those of the scouts who had the duty of searching for infractions of the health code ran across the greatest trouble, because they were dealing with private individuals, some of whom nursed petty “grouches” against them because compelled to do what the boys demanded or take the chances of being summoned before a Squire and heavily fined.

Hugh used considerable diplomacy in dealing with these offenders. He did not wish the scouts to make any enemies when it could be avoided. So when there happened to be some stubborn fellow who firmly believed he had a right to do things that were offensive to the neighbors and the community at large, just because he was on his own grounds, and threatened to go to law to resist, Hugh tried other measures besides violence and threats.

In several instances he performed what seemed next door to miracles, in the eyes of the boys, and the amused people as well. Hugh could “blarney” most any one into coming around to his way of thinking, given half a chance, was what Billy Worth always said, and in fact the young scout master proved the truth of this assertion in several instances.

One crabbed and rich old fellow in particular, who had little to do with his neighbors, but persisted in keeping several fierce dogs that barked most of the night, upon being threatened with the passage of a new law that would proclaim such animals within the corporate limits of the town a public nuisance if complaint were handed in signed by six neighbors, told them they could pass all the regulations they wanted and he would take out an injunction, which by the delay of the law would allow him to do about as he pleased the rest of his life.

Judge Coffin, from the town of Lawrence, whose acquaintance some of the scouts had made at the time of the famous flood,^[1] when they were enabled to save several lives and win the esteem of the entire community, chancing to visit Oakvale on some official business just about that time, confided to Hugh the fact that unfortunately what Mr. Griffin claimed was true, and that by successive

injunctions it was possible to fend off a decision for months, sometimes years.

This was not the worst of it, for if one man could baffle the desire of the community in that way his example might become contagious and the precedent thus set be copied by others, until all the good the reform wave had done would be lost.

So clever Hugh had figured out it was essential that Mr. Griffin be won over to the cause, even if it took much of his spare time to accomplish the seemingly impossible result.

Like a wise general, Hugh first looked over the field. He knew that when a battle is to be fought the side that knows the various conformations of the ground always possesses an advantage over those less posted.

In making all sorts of inquiries Hugh learned a lot about the past of this crabbed old man who seemed so like vinegar. There was a reason, it seemed, for his “drawing within his shell,” and refusing to have more than casual communication with his neighbors.

Mr. Griffin had suffered a cruel shock many years before, losing his wife and two lovely children in a fire. One girl was left to him, and she grew up to womanhood, gave him a great deal of trouble, and finally ran away with a worthless fellow. Some years afterwards, the old gentleman, now become estranged from the world that had treated him so cruelly, went away, and came back with a child he announced as his grandson, the last of his stock, for the daughter had died.

Alas! this little boy was a cripple and deformed. Hugh had seen him several times, but the old man kept a strict watch, and allowed no intruders in his grounds where those dogs roamed at night time.

The hunchback was now all of ten years of age, and when Hugh saw Mr. Griffin buying some boys' books before Christmas he understood that the little fellow at least must love to read.

Here then was the scheme which Hugh worked out. He had plenty of books that told of the doings of Boy Scouts. Besides, he had an old manual that he could easily spare. So he bribed the grocer's boy, who daily visited the Griffin home, and admitted that he chatted with the hunchback frequently, to give Archibald

the package of books on the sly, and tell him the leader of the Wolf Patrol had sent them with his compliments to help a “shut-in” realize what scout life meant.

Hugh heard from his kind act, for on the very next day he received a splendid little note from the boy, thanking him heartily for his thoughtfulness, and saying that he would devour those books “ferociously,” he was so “crazy” about reading of what boys more fortunate than himself were doing.

Hugh kept it up after that, and before long there was a most friendly feeling springing up between the two. One fine day Hugh was surprised to have Mr. Griffin stop him on the street, and he realized that the severe look could leave the face of the well-named man when he chose to drop the mask.

“My little grandchild has been telling me about your kindness in sending him books to read,” the gentleman started to say. “Now, I have been very particular about the type of books I select for him, because I want the poor little fellow to know only the better side of life. At first I was afraid you had broken down the barrier I have erected, but when I came to look over the handbook of the scouts, and found what a splendid foundation the organization is built upon I felt sure that books written along similar lines could do a boy only good. I am pleased to say that upon glancing over those you sent him, I have been immensely satisfied.”

He offered his hand to Hugh, something no boy in Oakvale had ever known Mr. Griffin to do in all the years past. Hugh flushed with a sense of satisfaction upon realizing that he was on the road to success, and that his diagnosis of the stern old gentleman’s real nature had not been amiss.

“I am glad you do not think I was playing a mean part in getting those books to Archibald,” he said, simply. “We scouts feel for any chap who is deprived of the glorious chances we have to spend many good times in the open. I thought he would be glad to learn about scout life, even if he could never hope to enjoy it himself.”

“What is more to the point,” continued Mr. Griffin, “I’ve had my eyes opened to the fact that it is a bad thing for any man to allow himself to remain in ignorance with what is going on around him as the years progress. I am ashamed to admit that I never dreamed there had been such a vast revolution in the training of boys during the years I’ve kept aloof from the world. I’ve seen mention of the scouts

many times in my papers, but never took the trouble to investigate—in fact, treated the whole matter as somewhat of a military movement copied after the Old World methods. I am delighted to learn that such is not the case.”

Then he went on to say Archibald was eager to meet Hugh, and that if only he could come over and take supper with them that evening it would give both of the “shut-ins” great pleasure indeed.

Such luck Hugh had hardly anticipated, but he was only too glad to accept the invitation in the spirit it was given.

“I have some more really splendid books I want you to let him read,” he went on to say with spirit. “If you don’t object I’ll come over this very evening,” for, as we happen to know, the scout master believed in “striking when the iron is hot.”

After that it was easy for Hugh. Once he had gained entrance to the Griffin home he found a means for occupying a place in the hearts of both the hunchback boy and his grandfather. By a wise system of approaching the subject discreetly Hugh quickly found a way of getting Mr. Griffin to change his mind about keeping those noisy dogs.

It was once more a case of the gentle sun’s rays accomplishing what even the most violent wind could not do.

Hugh never boasted of his victories, but in some way the truth became known. Possibly Mr. Griffin, now mingling more than in the past with his neighbors, secretly amused, told it himself. At any rate it served to add to the laurels Hugh had already won as a diplomat, as well as a scout leader.

So the good work went on. This incident connected with Mr. Griffin and his pests of barking dogs was only one example of how the scouts managed to accomplish their ends. It is not by mere promises of prosecution alone that nuisances can be abated, for sometimes reason goes a great ways toward effecting a cure.

A few threats had been made, but so far none of the boys had really suffered actual violence. Truth to tell, the cowards who had been bullies knew that when they assailed the scout uniform they really went up against the entire vested authority of the town as represented by the mayor, the police, and the better element of the citizens.

Speedy retaliation had fallen upon those astonished offenders who had laughed at the warnings given by the Auxiliary Police. They realized that because a fellow is under a man's size and wears a khaki uniform, it is no sign that he cannot enforce his authority.

Things had apparently been going on swimmingly, and there seemed every indication that victory was in sight when Ralph by accident overheard that plot to bring about the undoing of the scouts in the estimation of the town people. It was plainly the last desperate effort of the opposition. If they were beaten in this round the chances were there would be a clean sweep to crown the efforts of those who were working so hard for home protection in Oakvale. It would have been proven conclusively that a new rule must hereafter be reckoned with, which was founded on *order* and the rights of the community as against private privileges.

CHAPTER X.

BENJY'S SUSPICIOUS ACTIONS.

Really, it was strange how things crowded into that particular day. Hugh was down doing some errand in the shopping district of the town when, by the merest accident, he chanced to see Benjy Sherwood again.

The sight of Tom's high-strung younger brother would be apt to interest Hugh at any time nowadays, for it caused him to remember that he had as yet been unable to carry his promise into effect, owing to the great rush of matters accumulating on his shoulders.

He was particularly interested, however, when he saw what the boy was doing, for plainly Benjy had some silver coins in his hand which he was counting.

Hugh jumped to a conclusion that gave him a bad feeling in the region of his heart. When a fellow is seen coming out of a bird store where all sorts of pets are kept, and counting silver coins from one hand to the other, the most natural conclusion is that he must have been selling something there, and wants to make sure he has received the right amount.

Hugh chanced to know that Benjy had been deeply interested in Belgian hares, and received a present of a handsome pair of them on Christmas, of which he had been exceedingly fond. Hugh wondered if it could be possible that the boy, hard pressed for the means to pay some "debt of honor," as he considered it, had actually sacrificed his pets.

The thought of what a hold that gaming habit must have gained upon poor Benjy filled the scout master with dismay. He took a few steps past the store, and then felt compelled to yield to an irresistible impulse to make sure; so, turning back, he walked into the place.

Hugh had often been there before, for he was himself interested in fancy pigeons, and had a coop of “homers” at home from which he anticipated raising some fine youngsters, which he could take many miles from home and find awaiting him on his return. Indeed, he aspired some day to possess famous fliers that might cover a thousand miles, and still find their way home inside of a few days.

So Hugh strolled around looking at the coops containing all sorts of pets both in fur and feather, from cunning pet dogs to fowls with pedigrees, and parrots that could say dozens of strange phrases, or even sing in a croaking fashion.

Finally Hugh approached the owner of the shop, who was busily engaged with some work.

“Do you happen to have any Belgian hares, Mr. Huggins?” he asked, in a casual way, as though he had looked around and failed to notice any in the various cages or runs.

“Why, that reminds me I forgot to put that pair in the cage, I was so busy after the boy left,” remarked the owner of the store, as he hurried over to an old basket that had a cover to it, and from which he drew a struggling object with long ears, which he tossed into an empty cage, to be presently followed by a second.

Hugh’s last doubt was now laid. He had recognized the Belgian hares by certain well-remembered marks, as once the property of Benjy Sherwood, who must have sacrificed them for a particular object.

When Hugh remembered what he feared that object might be he found himself shivering, he was so sorry for poor Tom, whose heart seemed so sore these days.

More than ever was Hugh bothered to know just how he should go about gaining the confidence of that high-strung lad. He had found a way to gain the heart of such a scoffer and doubter as Mr. Griffin, whom everybody deemed beyond hope. Surely there must be some method he could apply to reach Benjy’s confidence, so that he might coax him to join the scouts, and drop those suspicious companions.

“I’ll start right in to-morrow,” Hugh told himself, vigorously, as he left the pet shop and headed for home. “Until this other business is settled and the coast cleared, I mustn’t allow myself to be tempted to take up any side issues. But if

all goes well, and to-morrow sees things turn our way, as I hope, then I promise myself that I'll turn to Tom's trouble and help him out."

All the rest of that afternoon he could not keep his thoughts away from what he had learned about Benjy. It seemed as if the boy must be sinking fast in the quicksands of the treacherous stream into which he had so boldly waded. Unless prompt measures were taken for his rescue, Hugh feared Benjy would ere long be so deeply involved that such a thing as saving him must become three times as difficult.

"I'll drop over and see Tom to-night," he promised himself, as he sat awaiting the summons to supper. "I don't remember meeting him all day, that is, to speak to. He's beginning to believe by this time that I've about forgotten my promise. Poor Tom, I'm sorry for him as can be, and only hope we can convince Benjy he can get three times as much real fun out of joining the scouts as keeping company with that tough crowd."

Hugh was not as sanguine as his words might indicate. He knew what a grip habit can take upon most boys, and how once they yield to the allurements of vices it proves very difficult for them to break away, or even acknowledge they are on the wrong path.

He had several half-formed plans, any one of which he might be able to work upon, after he had consulted with Tom. The latter was one of the sturdiest of the scouts, and Hugh particularly wanted him to be present on that night watch. He partly feared Tom might not feel inclined to come forth, and it was partly with the intention of gaining his consent that Hugh meant to drop around after supper and see him.

It happened several things came up to delay him. First a report was brought in by a member of the troop that was of sufficient importance to merit immediate attention. So Hugh had to talk with Chief Wallis over the wire. Then something else arose that took another half-hour of his precious time.

When finally the decks were cleared it was almost half-past seven, and the meeting had been called for eight.

"I must hustle if I mean to have a talk with Tom before we both go over to the meeting room," was what Hugh told himself, as he snatched up his cap and made for the door.

He had hardly gained the street before he ran across two of the boys heading in the direction of the church, where a room had been placed at the disposal of the troop, together with the free use of electric light, and heat in winter time.

At the next corner, however, Hugh stopped short.

“Sorry I can’t go all the way with you, Chester and Dale, but I’ve got an errand over at Tom Sherwood’s house. I’ll be with you later on, and will fetch Tom with me. My lips are sealed about the object of this special meeting until then, so there’s no use trying to coax me to speak. Those who are selected will be told everything, and the rest put on their honor not to say a word about anything they suspect to-night.”

“Wow! you certainly have got us all guessing good and hard, Hugh,” laughed Dale Evans, who belonged to the Otter Patrol. “I sure hope I’ll be one of those lucky chosen ones, so I can know what all this mystery means.”

“Oh! any old thing is liable to happen in such exciting times as these,” said Chester Brownell, who was one of the best athletes in the troop, and would assuredly be picked out by Hugh as one of the guards of the night; though Chester, being in complete ignorance concerning matters, could not know this.

Hugh hurried as best he could toward the Sherwood home, which was some distance away from the corner where he parted company with the other scouts. There was little chance that Tom might have already started for the rendezvous, but somehow Hugh suspected the other was feeling too anxious to take any pleasure in going to a called meeting, when he could just as well stay at home and worry his mind with those questions that would not down.

Tom himself came to the door in answer to his knock, and seemed to be a little surprised to find who was there. Hugh thought he looked more gloomy than ever, though possibly that had been a faint gleam of revived hope that flittered athwart Tom’s long face at seeing the scout master.

“I thought you mightn’t come out to-night, Tom,” said Hugh, as he pushed in without even waiting for an invitation, “and so I made up my mind to step over and be sure of you. Fact is, Tom, there’s going to be something planned of great importance to our cause. I’ve depended on you to be one of six or eight of the brawniest fellows in the troop to stand by and help us win a great victory.”

Tom looked somewhat impressed, though he shook his head sadly as he went on to say in reply:

“Well, I had almost made up my mind, Hugh, that I didn’t care to go out to-night. Fact is, to tell you the truth, I’m so miserable these days that I don’t seem to care whether school keeps or not—lost my appetite, and even think of resigning from the scouts.”

Hugh slapped him on the back in his cheery fashion.

“Don’t let me hear you make that threat again, Tom,” he said, in pretended severity. “We need you too much every day to let you go. Besides, your influence is going to count for a heap after the town is cleared up. You don’t know how much it means to have a scout in good standing in a family. But what ails you, Tom? Has anything new happened to give you the blues again?”

“Yes,” came the reply, accompanied with a deep sigh from the heart.

CHAPTER XI. THE REVELATION.

“Tell me what it is all about, Tom, won’t you?” asked Hugh, as he followed the other upstairs to his own room. Somehow, Tom seemed to feel that they ought to be alone so his mother might not overhear what passed between them.

“I’ll just close the door, Hugh, before I say anything,” remarked Tom, “though for that matter there’s no danger Benjy will interrupt us, because he’s gone off for the evening. This time I’m glad to tell you it’s to a sociable they’re having over at our church for the young people.”

His manner when saying this showed that Tom would be a happy fellow, indeed, if he could only know that every night Benjy was away from home, he was enjoying himself in similar innocent amusements as on this particular occasion.

“It’s this way, you see, Hugh,” he continued, after finding a seat close to his visitor, “for a little while now Benjy’s been acting mighty decent, and I’ve come to let myself take on more hope than I had the last time you and I talked it over. He seems more like his old self, and was even asking some questions about the scouts, though up to now he’s never seemed to care a thing about our organization, you remember. But it was too good to last, Hugh.”

Remembering what he had seen that afternoon, with Benjy counting silver coins he had received from the bird fancier, Hugh himself was obliged to mentally confess that it looked very much that way.

“Go on, please, Tom!” he urged when the other paused.

“Well, this is how it happened,” explained the other, slowly, as though he hated to talk about such a painful subject, and had to force himself to take it up only because he knew it was necessary he should enter into details. “After supper this

evening, just before Benjy went out, he gave me a quick look when he thought I wasn't paying any attention, and then slipped upstairs. I waited for a little while, and then just couldn't stand it any longer, so I managed to leave the sitting room and go up the back stairs.

"Keeping on my tiptoes, I moved along the upper hall in the half shadows to where I could watch the door of my room. It was partly open, and there was a light inside, but I couldn't see Benjy at all, though I could hear him moving about as if looking for something. Then the light suddenly went out, and he came out. Hugh, it made me as cold as ice when I even heard him chuckling to himself as he hurried to his own room, just as if he thought he had played a good joke on me."

"Of course he didn't know you were so close to him?" asked Hugh when Tom stopped talking to swallow as though something seemed to be choking him.

"No, and as soon as he disappeared in his own room I slipped downstairs again, and took up the book I had been reading. He went off a few minutes afterwards, and called out good-night to all as cheery as he used to in the old days before he got going with that tough set."

"Did you come up here and look around to find out what he had been doing?" asked the scout master.

"I wanted to the worst kind, Hugh, but it seemed as if I just couldn't. I was almost afraid to look for fear of making some more discoveries that would upset me. Why, Hugh, honest to goodness, I feel so weary this very night you would think I was an old man, and yet I'll be sixteen to-morrow, you remember."

"Well," Hugh told him, "it's always my principle, when I've got a disagreeable task to perform, to get at it right away. The longer you wait, Tom, the worse it gets for you. The only way is to shut your teeth hard together, and pitch in."

"I guess you're right, Hugh—sure you must be. I've been silly to hold back. No matter what I learn, the truth can't be any worse than this terrible uncertainty that's gripping me, and making me shiver as if I had the ague again." He jumped from his seat as though determined to carry his words into effect.

"I suppose the first thing I ought to look at is my trunk, eh, Hugh?" he went on to say, fumbling in a pocket for his keys.

“Well, you know better than I do where you keep your valuables,” said the other, trying to appear merry, though somehow, Tom did not respond to any appreciable extent. “I see that since that other time I was up here you’ve changed your way of leaving your trunk unlocked.”

Tom flushed, and shook his head.

“Oh! I tell you it galled me to think I was locking it against my own brother,” he said, tremulously, “but then I remembered that it is a sin to put temptation in the path of any fellow whose weakness you know. Though for that matter a common key would unlock this trunk.”

He soon threw back the lid and bent over, fumbling through the contents. Hugh stood close by, watching him with more or less curiosity and interest. He saw that Tom was evidently in fear and trembling, as though constantly dreading lest he make some unpleasant discovery.

As he proceeded he seemed to regain a portion of his former confidence.

“Here’s my little savings bank all right, Hugh, and no one could ever manage to get anything out of that in the short time he was in my room, even if the trunk could be opened. So far as I can see, nothing has been taken out of here.”

When he allowed the lid to drop again Tom was looking more or less relieved. Evidently his main concern had been in connection with the money, he had in that little metal bank, for if Benjy had meant to take anything it would seem that ready cash would tempt him more than all else.

“Oh! perhaps, Hugh, he didn’t come in here for that,” he broke out with. “I remember now that sometimes in the past when Benjy was going out to a party he used to want to fix his tie, and brush his hair before the mirror in my room, for he said the light was better here. It may have been that, Hugh, you know.”

The scout master understood that poor Tom was like a drowning man clutching at a straw in hopes of keeping himself afloat. Hugh himself might have been inclined to look at the matter from much the same standpoint only for that strange incident of the afternoon, which he could not explain, try as he might, save along very unpleasant lines.

“Let’s hope so, Tom,” he hastened to say, “though now you’re about it, in order

to ease your mind, and leave no stone unturned, I should think you had better make a clean sweep in here.”

“Do you mean search every drawer in my chiffonier and dresser, Hugh?” demanded Tom. “I can do that easily enough, but surely he wouldn’t think to take any of my clothes. I might tell if he’d mussed around in the drawers searching for my savings bank, though, because I keep everything just so; and the clean shirt I expect to wear to-morrow morning I placed on the top of the pile. That’s my habit as a scout to have things kept as neat as wax. Why, Hugh, my mother laughs at me, and calls me a fussy old maid, you know, all on account of those habits of thrift and preparedness.”

He started in at the bureau drawers for some reason or other, and as he opened each one and ran his eye over the contents, Tom continued to talk.

“Seems like nothing has been bothered that I can notice, Hugh. Here’s another drawer containing some of my surveying instruments, for, with Bud Morgan, I’m still interested along those lines, though of late I haven’t been out afield with him. I was a little afraid one of these instruments might be gone. You see, they’re worth considerable money, and were made a present to me by an old uncle who’s interested in my career. But, so far as I can see, not a single thing is missing, Hugh.”

There was a positive air of relief in Tom’s voice when he said this. Undoubtedly the contents of that drawer of instruments had been giving him more anxiety than he had confessed, and he was glad that no unpleasant discovery had developed.

“The rest will be just an apology of a search, Hugh, because, you see, there’s absolutely nothing worth taking besides these things. Still, to satisfy my mind as you say, perhaps I’d just better run through the drawers of the chiffonier.”

He started at the top one. Hugh indolently watched his progress downward, never dreaming that there would come anything out of the ordinary. Suddenly, as Tom started to open the drawer that he said contained his clean shirts, the scout master saw him give a big start.

“Why, what’s this?” Tom stammered, at the same time taking out a long package carefully tied up, and with something written on the outside. Hugh also noticed that an envelope was pinned on to the paper covering.

Somehow or other Hugh experienced a thrill. It was as if he had a premonition that something in the nature of a great surprise was coming. Tom was staring hard at what he saw written on the paper. Then he snatched the note, and with trembling hands commenced to get at the enclosure, while the scout master strove to analyze his feelings from the flitting expressions that chased each other across his face.

He saw Tom read on, first with incredulity, then sheer amazement, and finally a look of supreme joy came upon his countenance that spoke even louder than his words could the revelation that had come to his faithful heart.

“Oh! Hugh! Hugh! would you believe it, Benjy’s all right? He’s—he’s—oh! I’m so happy I hardly know what to say! Read his note, Hugh, please!”

CHAPTER XII.

CLEAR SAILING AHEAD.

Hugh took the missive from Tom's hand, and at the same time managed to see what was written on the outside of the carefully done-up package that the other had laid on the top of the chiffonier.

“To Brother Tom: Wishing him many happy returns of his birthday. From Benjy!”

Even before Hugh read a single word in the note he believed he had a pretty clear comprehension as to the true state of affairs. His heart, too, was bounding with sudden relief over the happy outcome of the troublesome matter, although it was not to be expected that, being an outsider, Hugh could feel one-quarter the joy that filled Tom's soul.

The letter ran as follows:

“Dear Tom:

“Here's the best thing I could think of to get you. It's a whole lot better than your old racket ever was, which I am having repaired for my own use. I've taken a liking to tennis lately. And, Tom, you'll be glad to know I've thrown that whole crowd overboard, and I mean to make an application to join the scouts the first chance I get. Perhaps you would like to propose my name. Many happy returns of the day, Tom. I'm beginning to realize what a whole lot I owe you for keeping everlastingly at me, even when I kept turning you down. But I want to forget all that now, for it can never happen again with me.

“Your brother, Benjy.”

Hugh folded up that note with a feeling of delight he had seldom experienced before. Then Benjy was turning out to be a splendid sort of fellow! Hugh anticipated he might prove to be that once he made up his mind to break away from those evil connections that were pulling him into the mire.

He must have been really hunting for the old tennis racquet on that other occasion when caught rummaging through Tom's trunk. He had appeared confused because he feared his secret might be discovered. He had not only taken every cent he had in his bank to pay for the new racquet, but had actually sold his valuable Belgian hares in order to make up the amount he still owed at the sporting goods store.

By now Tom had snatched up the package and managed to get it undone. He uttered cries of sincere admiration and delight when he saw what an elegant tennis racquet was revealed. His eyes were swimming with tears as he looked at Hugh.

"Oh! Hugh!" he stammered, "will I ever be able to forgive myself for thinking all those bad things about him? I never felt so ashamed in my life as I do now. But I'm going to make amends for it, see if I don't, Hugh. Look what a dandy racquet he got me, will you? Spent every cent he had saved for his Fourth."

Hugh hardly knew whether he ought to relate what he had discovered. The temptation to do so overcame his scruples. Besides, now that Benjy's innocence had been assured, he thought it too good to be hidden under a bushel by silence.

"I'm going to tell you something, Tom," he went on to say, with a smile. "Queer, isn't it, that often the very things we fear for most turn out to be for the very best?"

Tom immediately began to show new interest. How his fine eyes sparkled, and upon his face that worried look could no longer be seen.

"What! is there anything more good coming, Hugh?" he cried, eagerly.

"You'll have to judge for yourself," replied the scout master, after which he proceeded to relate how he had seen Benjy coming out of the bird store kept by Mr. Huggins, and counting some silver, also how the discovery had filled him with dismay.

“It was only natural it should, you understand, Tom,” he went on to say in apology, “after what we suspected. But I made up my mind I would learn what he had been doing in there.”

When Tom heard about the selling of Benjy’s pet Belgian hares he lowered his head suddenly as though he did not want his friend to see that his eyes were swimming, for as a rule, boys have a prejudice against appearing weak. Hugh respected his brotherly emotion, for he knew that it must be complete joy that affected the other now, and not anxiety.

By the time Hugh finished speaking Tom managed to get a fresh grip on himself, even though his voice did tremble somewhat.

“Hugh, I’m bound to redeem those long-eared little animals if I have to borrow the money to do it with!” he exclaimed. “To think of his making that great big sacrifice just for me! I know how fond Benjy’s been of his pets! Oh! Hugh, when you came in here little did I dream what glorious news there was going to be sprung on me! I was feeling away down in the cellar, and now, well, I seem to be on the roof looking up into the beautiful heavens!”

That was not such a bad description of Tom’s feelings, considering the fact that he was only a matter-of-fact boy, and struggling along under unusual emotion.

Hugh did not attempt to explain how possibly it might be just as well to allow Benjy to make his sacrifice. It gave the boy more or less satisfaction, and would always be a link connecting him with his brother. Later on Hugh might urge upon Tom the wisdom of letting matters stand just as they were.

He handled the racquet and praised its good qualities.

“It was pretty smart of the boy hiding it in the drawer containing your shirts,” Hugh went on to say, laughing; “especially as he figured that to-morrow was your regular morning for putting on a clean one, and you would be sure to discover the package the first thing on your birthday.”

“Wasn’t it, though?” said Tom, chuckling. “That shows, Tom, that Benjy would make a good scout, because he has the sense of observation well developed to start with.”

“Just what it does, Tom, and some day before long I hope to see your brother

wearing the honored khaki. It's a proud family that can boast of *two* scouts, let me tell you. And once Benjy joins—no danger of his ever going back. A world will open up to his eyes that he never dreamed existed. Old things will have passed away and everything become new, once he has put on the magic spectacles of scoutcraft. I've been told that by a dozen fellows, and I know what a change it makes in most boys."

Tom began to wrap the precious racquet carefully up again in the paper that had been around it when he made his startling discovery. How tenderly he handled the present given by his brother. Hugh even thought that all other gifts showered on Tom in times past must sink into utter insignificance when compared with this special one; for it represented, in his eyes, the dissolution of those serious doubts that had of late been weighing down his spirits until his heart felt like lead.

"I'm meaning to put it back just where I found it, you see, Hugh," he explained, "and make things look as if no one had touched it. Luckily the envelope wasn't sealed, so I didn't destroy the same. You may wonder why I do that, and I'll tell you. I want to open it again in the morning just as if I had found it for the first time. Then there's another reason, you see, Hugh; Benjy might get home to-night ahead of me, and finding that I hadn't shown up yet, take a notion to step in here just to have a last peep and a pat at his package. I wouldn't like him to know I had been investigating ahead of time, you understand, Hugh."

The scout master could read between the lines. He realized that not for the world would repentant Tom want Benjy to suspect he had been looking all through his room in the fear and expectation of making a distressing discovery that would implicate the younger brother. Nor could Hugh blame the other for wanting to conceal such a humiliating thing as this.

Accordingly the packet was carefully put on top of the clean shirts in the drawer. To all appearances it lay just as Benjy had placed it, and if he did peep in the receptacle, there was nothing to tell him that the well-tied bundle had been disturbed.

"There, that's a big load off my shoulders," said Tom, with a look of relief. "Now, Hugh, I'm ready to go with you, and do anything you ask of me. Why, I feel that light-hearted I could almost fly," and he flapped his arms as though they were wings, an action that caused Hugh to laugh aloud.

“Well, just hold your horses a bit, Tom,” he advised. “I have need of your services to-night, and it would be a shame to have you take a flight. Suppose you get your cap and come along with me to the meeting.”

“There must be something serious doing, Hugh, if all this mystery counts for anything.”

“There certainly is, Tom. You’ll learn about it as soon as I’ve picked out the scouts I want to serve with me. They’re all going to be husky fellows like yourself.”

“You’ve got me worked up to top-notch speed, Hugh, with what you say,” said Tom, scurrying around, and looking for his cap, which he found behind a chair where it had evidently fallen when he tossed it aside earlier in the evening. “But no matter what it all means I’m with you to the last lick. I feel as if I could whip my weight in wildcats. Lead the way, and every scout you want will follow you, Hugh.”

And so the twain passed out and headed for the rendezvous, where they were likely to find full twenty-five fellows in khaki impatiently awaiting the coming of their leader, and an explanation of this unusual “called” meeting.

CHAPTER XIII.

PUTTING THE CLAMPS ON.

Hugh had figured it all out, and decided that the first thing he would do after the business part of the meeting had been carried through, would be to pick the fellows who were to help guard the jewelry establishment with some of the regular police force, so as to surprise the thieves, if they should come as expected.

He believed it might be unwise to tell the others anything about the plan of campaign. This was not because he had reason to suspect the loyalty of a single scout, but boys will talk as well as girls, and unwittingly a fellow might let something escape him that, through devious channels, would be carried to the ears of those who were concerned in the contemplated raid on the store.

This plan was carried out to the letter. Those whose names were not on the list of lucky ones felt a little aggrieved, but at the same time they knew it would do no good to enter a complaint. Hugh had promised they were to be given full particulars as soon as possible. He assured them also that it was a move in the interests of the grand project that engaged their labors—cleaning up Oakvale.

Once he found himself left with seven stout chums, Hugh proceeded to gather them around him, and explained what was in the air. He had a most attentive audience, and it would have been amusing to any one interested in boys to watch the expressions of wonder and growing delight that gradually crept over their faces as they drank in his words.

Say what you will, the seed of adventure has always taken root deep down in the hearts of every healthy boy. The mere fact that they were scouts, and had promised to observe the rules of the organization whose badge they so proudly wore, did not mean that they must stifle this feeling, which, if directed along the right channels, does a boy ten times as much good as harm.

Dozens of eager questions poured in upon Hugh as soon as he had managed to tell them about the dastardly plot that had been hatched up by those desperate men who realized they were getting near the end of their rope, and that the energy of the scouts was primarily responsible for the whole thing.

Hugh acted with considerable patience and answered as best he might. He realized that under similar conditions he, too, might have felt inclined to ask for further information, because it was a tremendous subject, truth to tell, and difficult to grapple with in the beginning.

“We’ll make our way by a round-about route to a place appointed,” he went on to explain, “and there we’ll find Chief Wallis waiting for us. He will have three of his men along with him, all that can be spared from their night duties. Between us we’ll probably fix it so that a complete cordon will be thrown around the jewelry store they’ve picked out for robbery.”

How they hung upon his every word! Hugh would know just how to place them in order that they might be able to throw themselves upon the night prowlers after the latter had actually started to break into the store. Hugh had explained that they must not be premature in unmasking their batteries, or the thieves might find a loophole by means of which they could escape from the meshes of the law.

When Hugh decided that it was time they started to effect a junction with the regular police; he warned his followers for the last time how to act.

“If it comes to actual fighting,” he said, impressively, “remember, you must leave *that* to the officers, who are armed to bear the brunt of the attack. We can throw ourselves on any fellow, if the chance offers, and hold him down. But all that will be arranged exactly after we meet the other guards.”

He took them along an unfrequented street and by making several detours, the little group finally found the threatened store looming up close by.

Hugh gave a prearranged signal and received a soft reply.

“The Chief is over there in that dense shadow,” he whispered to the rest. “We must slip along and join him. First, Tom, here, can go, and drop down when he finds himself in the dark spot. Then Alec will follow, and in regular order Buck, Ralph, Jack, Bud and Sam are to imitate him. I’ll fetch up the rear. Make a

move, Tom.”

They were all on their mettle, and besides, had the reputation of being clever scouts, well versed in most of the secrets of woodcraft. Consequently the maneuver was carried out without a single hitch. Before many minutes passed Hugh, having arrived on the spot, found his chums crouching there close by the Chief.

In low whispers the head of the Oakvale police force now explained their plan of campaign. It was not known whether any hostile eye kept watch over the threatened store or not, but they must always believe that such might be the case, and act accordingly.

That principle was also in line with a scout's education, and pleased the boys exceedingly. They had been taught never to underestimate an enemy, and that it were far better to waste time in taking precautions than have over-confidence ruin the best-laid plan.

One of the police and three of the scouts were to remain outside the building, and their part in the enterprise was easily guessed. If the thieves were like most of their class they would very likely leave one of their number without to keep watch and give a signal should any sudden peril loom up. It was to secure that sentry that the force detailed to stay in the open had been marked off.

Hugh with the rest and the Chief meant to enter the store. He had visited it often and ought to be well acquainted with its every detail. Even at that Hugh never left a thing to chance when he could help it. That very afternoon, after he had left Ralph and the others, the boy had made some sort of excuse to drop in at Ainslee's establishment. With his scout ability he had been able to make a mental map, and had noted every particular of the store, so that he believed he could, if necessary, get around in the dark without colliding with showcases or pillars or counters.

Chief Wallis must have found a way to communicate with the proprietor of the store, for he certainly had a key that opened the side door, through which numerous shadowy figures now silently slipped.

Here again Hugh proved of considerable value, for it was he who really directed the others where to hide so that they might divide their force. The Chief had a pocket electric light along with him, but he hesitated to make use of it, lest some

one passing and repassing the front of the store, and looking in, take notice of the strange glow, and communicate the alarm to his fellows.

Talking was absolutely forbidden among the scouts. They could only indicate the tremendous interest they were taking in the proceedings by numerous sly digs in the ribs, after the manner of lively boys unduly repressed. None of these were given with such vigor as to elicit a gasp or groan.

How still it seemed after they had been posted in their hiding places. Some of the scouts must have thought they could actually hear the beating of their own hearts, such was the stress under which they labored.

Luckily Hugh had used discretion when making his selections. He had not chosen them merely for brawn alone, but for an ability to keep a good grip on their spirits, and bravely face exciting conditions that might well try the nerves of experienced officers.

An hour passed. It did not slip by, as most of the waiting scouts would have readily agreed. In fact, that was one of the longest hours they ever knew, and as ten boomed from the church clock, they could hardly believe their ears, for surely, they figured, it must be that a longer time had elapsed.

Hugh allowed them a chance to change their positions when cramped, but insisted that it be done with due regard to caution. They could not tell when suspicious ears would be listening for any sound to indicate trouble. When the thieves did come they would do so—silently, and without any trumpet to announce their mission.

The second hour was worse by far than the first. How their lower limbs did seem to want to “go to sleep,” as the boys termed it when circulation of blood ceased, and a species of numbness resulted. Various were the remedies resorted to in order to overcome this unpleasant feeling. When eleven struck some of the crouching figures moved uneasily and came as near groaning as they dared.

Still, it could not be long now before something was likely to happen, Hugh whispered to Tom, with orders to pass it along the line, and then become mute again.

Hugh himself was wondering whether or not all these preparations were doomed to disappointment. What if the grand scheme had fallen through, or the intended

robbery been postponed because of good and sufficient reasons? He felt that he would be grievously disappointed, for somehow he had come to set much store on being able to strike this telling blow against the worst of the offenders of decency in Oakvale.

He had an impression that this would mark the final effort to break down the new order of things; that if the robbery of the jewelry establishment, and the subsequent placing of the crime at the door of certain innocent parties, could be balked in its perpetration, the last barrier would have yielded, and after that the reform people would have a clean order of things.

It must have been pretty near the midnight hour when a door was heard to close. That little piece of carelessness on the part of the thieves was likely to cost them dear in the end, since it gave ample warning of their coming.

One soft hiss from Hugh and every scout flattened himself as low as he could, so that discovery might not follow in case those who had entered the store produced any sort of light.

They were not experts in this profession, Hugh guessed, for they took certain chances of being discovered while at work. Nevertheless, they depended on the vigilance of their outpost stationed on the street, as well as the reputation acquired by the town night officers for shirking their work when on beat.

When it was seen that the two men had actually commenced operations on the big safe, as though meaning to break into it, and have "the game as well as the name" now that they had gone to all this trouble, the concealed boys could hardly keep from leaping up and throwing themselves upon the robbers. Only the mastery which Hugh possessed over them prevented such a break; for it had become second nature now with them to wait for orders before making a move.

Apparently, there was no need of waiting further before showing their hand. Those outside could take warning when they heard a sudden sound of confusion within, and pounce upon the "outlook."

The Chief had reserved to himself the giving of the signal, and every one, man and boy alike, knew what his particular part in the surprise attack was to be. If everything went right it would be like the mechanical action of clockwork machinery. Hugh hoped no cog in the wheel would miss connections, because that might interfere with the ultimate success of the whole scheme.

The two men were bending low when there came a sharp exclamation. They would have started up like a flash, but even then their action was just a trifle too late, for something heavy dropped upon them, and flattened both out upon the floor.

It was really the body of the Chief that had accomplished this coup. Before either one of the astonished rascals could squirm out from under his ponderous form the scouts became as busy as beavers. Hugh flashed the little light handed over to him by the Chief, and kept it playing full upon the focussing point where all their interest was centred. Consequently Tom, Sam and the rest of the fellows had no trouble in distributing themselves along the length of the recumbent figures of the disturbed thieves.

Hugh felt sure that, as Billy Worth would have said, it “was all over but the shouting,” when he saw how well pinned down the desperate rascals found themselves. He advanced closer so as to be in a position to carry out any wishes of the astute police head, such as slipping the waiting handcuffs over the wrists of the prisoners, and rendering them harmless, so that they might be stood up and looked over.

Several loud outcries from beyond the door announced that those who had been given the task of trapping the third member of the audacious set had taken a hint just as soon as they heard the first sound within the store. They soon came into the building pushing a man before them, who was lined up with the other pair.

Three more disgusted-looking fellows had likely never before been paraded in front of the scouts. Just as Hugh and Ralph had suspected, they turned out to be Gaffney, the former owner of the poolroom and gymnasium that had been abolished by orders of council; Slimmons, once the athletic trainer in the public schools before he took so heavily to drink that he had to be let go; and that third man, a stranger whom Hugh believed must be secretly interested in seeing Oakvale’s reform movement slump, perhaps because he had some connection with the interests of those who had been defying the law.

Caught in the act, it was likely to go hard with the three. Gaffney did tell his mates not to open their mouths, but to leave it to him to get them clear. Hugh believed they were leaning on a broken reed if they entertained any hope that political influence was going to keep the outraged law from taking its course. That day had gone for Oakvale, and the degrading elements which such men as

Gaffney represented, would have to emigrate to other quarters if they hoped to be able to continue to ply their evil vocations.

The trio of prisoners were marched through the now deserted streets to the lockup, where Chief Wallis would see to it that there was no chance for a getaway. The seven scouts, who accompanied Hugh and the little group of officers surrounding the prisoners, would never be able to forget the exciting experiences of that night. It would have to go down upon the annals of scout achievements, and serve to add one more glorious event to the string of exploits carried to a successful conclusion by the boys of the Oakvale Troop.

Before Hugh dismissed his followers he took occasion to thank them warmly for having acquitted themselves so splendidly. Tom Sherwood, in particular, squeezed his hand with peculiar emphasis at parting, as he said in a happy tone:

“This has been a white letter night for me, Hugh, and one I’ll never, never forget. You know why, Hugh, and the first thing to-morrow morning I’m going to buy those Belgian hares back if they are still in the market. So good night, and thank you a thousand times, Hugh. It’s bound to be a happy birthday for me, I tell you.”

CHAPTER XIV. FOR HOME PROTECTION.

On the following morning, when the news was circulated through Oakvale that some of the disorderly elements had attempted to make a raid on the Ainslee jewelry establishment, great was the consternation of the good people of the town. Then when it was added that the supposed robbery was only a part of a miserable scheme to try and bring the organization of Boy Scouts into disrepute, the indignation of the citizens knew no bounds.

“It is the culminating stroke of wickedness,” Mrs. Marsh declared as she spoke at a hurriedly arranged meeting of the best ladies in the town, “and proves that we did not commence this uplift movement a day too soon! Heaven only knows what might not have happened if not for those dear boys making up their minds that conditions had to change in Oakvale. I am free to confess that all our efforts to arouse the citizens had been marked by little success until Hugh and his comrades took it upon themselves to start the ball rolling.”

“Well,” said Mr. Dobbs, the minister, who chanced to be present so as to congratulate the Ladies’ League on the splendid success that was meeting their efforts, “it has often seemed to me that when Providence wants to overwhelm bad men in the toils, first of all their common sense is taken away so that they commit foolish acts that bring about their own downfall. By great good luck we have managed to turn the tables on these schemers, and they are hoist by their own petard.”

“And after what has happened,” added Mrs. Beverly earnestly, “there should not be a single dissenting citizen who cares a shred about his or her reputation. Bold, indeed, must the man or woman be who would dare side with such desperate rascals as Gaffney and Slimmons. The town is well rid of an encumbrance, and let us all be thankful in our hearts on this wonderful day that the sun can look down on our beautiful little city and not shine on a single evil spot. Our boys and

girls can go to and fro from this time on without that constant anxiety mothers have been feeling. I wish to state that much of this sense of security, I believe, we owe to the sterling efforts of Hugh Hardin and his sturdy comrades of Oakvale Troop. I love every one of them, and shall never be weary of sounding their praises, for they are boys of whom any town might well be proud.”

It is human nature to want to be on the winning side. Hugh believed there would be comparatively little trouble ahead for himself and comrades. The rapidity with which the men who had been taken to the lockup were brought to trial and punished for their misdeeds was going to deter others from attempting opposition.

In the midst of all this excitement, together with so much cause for congratulation, Hugh did not forget Tom Sherwood, and what had happened to brighten his life. The next time he met Tom he found his face radiant with the joy of living. Any one could see without being much of a reader of human nature that Tom was thoroughly happy. Many were the conjectures that his friends gave as to the reason for the boy’s sudden return to his old self. Tom kept his own counsel, and only told those who persisted in asking questions that a little trouble he had had on his mind had come out all right.

Hugh would keep the secret, of that Tom felt assured, and no one need ever know what terrible fears he had been entertaining on account of Benjy.

“Hugh,” he went on to say, as he clapped his hand on the shoulder of the scout master, with a movement that stood for deep affection, “it’s all come out right, and I’m the happiest fellow in Oakvale, let me tell you. Benjy and I understand each other now, and I’ll see to it that after this never a cloud is going to come between us. Hugh, he’s going to drop over tonight to see you.”

“I hope he doesn’t know that I felt worried about him the same way you did, Tom?” remarked Hugh.

“Oh! I was too ashamed of my fears to ever tell him about *that*,” replied the other, quickly. “Benjy has been explaining to me what a fight he had with himself before he could break off connections with that crowd. I think a dream he had one night had a heap to do with his making a decision. He wouldn’t explain just what it was, only shuddered as he spoke of it. You can govern yourself as you think best, Hugh, when you’re talking with him.”

“He’ll never learn a single thing from me about your worrying, Tom. Although you haven’t said so, I imagine he’s coming to make some inquiries about joining the scouts?”

“Yes, that’s what he’s got in mind now, Hugh. He’s found himself interested in a lot of things we’ve been doing the last year or so. Somehow, they seem to look different from what they used to. Benjy has waked up, you see, and once a fellow gets to feel an interest in scout doings he’s bound to go on wanting to know more. When the fever begins to burn in his veins he never finds any rest until he throws his lot in with the wearers of the khaki, and starts to learn things for himself.”

“Tell him I expect to be home to-night after supper,” said the scout master, “and will be glad to have him drop over. We need a few more good fellows to fill out the vacancies in several of the patrols. Lieutenant Denmead, you understand, may be home the end of this week, and assume his old position of head of the troop.”

“He’ll be surprised to learn what’s been going on here during his absence, believe me,” observed Tom, grinning.

“Oh! I keep in touch with him, and I’ve written an inkling of what we’ve been doing,” Hugh admitted. “All the same he’ll be pleased to find Oakvale so changed. The ladies say it must never go back again to where it was before. We scouts are of the same mind. Homes are going to be protected against those whose evil influence is all for pulling them down. That’s going to be the slogan of the scouts from now on. Tom, every new member we take in means one more timber in the structure we’re building on this safe foundation. Work all you can to spread the gospel of scout activities. There are dozens of fellows still around town who ought to be given an opportunity to learn the great benefits that go with scout membership.”

When Benjy came around that same evening, Hugh was primed for him. He went about his task with diplomacy, knowing that some boys can be led but never driven. So successfully did Hugh accomplish his labors that before Tom Sherwood’s younger brother left the house he was fairly wild to have his name brought before the nominating committee at the very next meeting.

“I feel that I’ve already lost a mighty fine time by my silly opposition to the

scouts,” Benjy frankly admitted. “I was all wrong, and I guess it was only my natural pig-headedness that kept me so. But I’ve seen a great light, Hugh. They say it’s better late than never. I want to enjoy some of those good times you fellows have. Besides, I expect I’ve got something to wipe out, because of late I’ve given my brother Tom more or less worry.”

When a scout goes about recruiting in the happy way Hugh did there is hardly a limit to his capacity for bringing new members into a troop. Those boys of Oakvale who wore the khaki had been highly favored by fortune in that opportunities for doing big things had ever knocked at their door.

Those readers who have had the pleasure of enjoying many of the previous books in this series will remember with satisfaction how they followed the fortunes of Hugh and his chums at the time they set out to improve the sanitary conditions of the community in which they lived.

Then there was the time of the great flood in a neighbouring town where several of the boys chanced to be visiting, during which they proved that they were made of the right kind of stuff, and won the admiration of the people of the inundated district.

The temptation is strong to mention several other instances where scout pluck and endurance won the day against heavy odds. For example, there was the time when the lads were camping in the vicinity of a great plant where a strike broke out, and rioting resulted. It may be remembered how they took hold and showed what they knew of “first aid to the injured,” winning the approbation of the Red Cross doctor and nurses when later on they came upon the scene.

During the County Fair the scouts also played a part that made them many new friends, acting as messengers and guides to the exhibitors and visitors, and even running a successful field hospital in the fair grounds.

To continue a little further it may also be remembered how they were unexpectedly called upon to fight the forest fires that threatened to ruin many farmers and others who had their homes within reach of the flames. Those boys who read that story will not soon forget how Hugh and his mates acted their part against heavy odds, and how splendidly they convinced a doubter that scout activities always made a boy more manly, as well as rendered him a far better citizen, of which any community might well be proud.

Then there was the time some of the Oakvale boys in khaki met with a remarkable adventure in connection with the motion picture players, which has been narrated at length in a recent volume.

Last, but far from least, while mentioning some of these interesting and instructive facts, it would hardly be fair to omit the occasion, not so far in the past, when some of those same fellows earned the right to have their names written on the Scouts' Roll of Honor, as well as managed to receive the valuable medal which is presented to those members in good standing who save human life at the risk of their own. If you have not already enjoyed reading that story lose no time in securing it, as you will be well repaid for your time and money.

But passing over these never-to-be-forgotten happenings of the past we must once more come back to Hugh and his chums at the time they labored so zealously to create a new moral atmosphere in the home town where they lived, and of which they were naturally very fond.

As the spring days went on the difficulties that had at first beset the reform wave in Oakvale gradually died down, until it seemed as though things were going along like clockwork. Men, women and children took a keen interest in helping the matter along. There was a healthy rivalry between certain cliques of boys with the idea of winning the highest praise for keeping their section of the town free from all nuisances, and so long as this spirit lived, the community was bound to profit.

Once the citizens began to enjoy full freedom from repulsive and unpleasant customs, they found the change so agreeable that no one had the temerity to sigh for the old régime; at least, if he did, he wisely kept his longings to himself.

Even the railroad company, that had up to that time absolutely refused to do anything that would necessitate the expenditure of money, seemed to have been shamed by the action of the scouts in looking after those dangerous spots, where the lives of the smaller school children were placed in danger.

First, a gate guarded by a flagman was placed at the point of most danger. That was an entering wedge, and as the citizens sent in a letter of thanks for the favor the railroad people awoke to the fact that the Oakvale station was a pretty dingy-looking affair after all. To the surprise and delight of the population word was received that it had been unanimously decided at the last meeting of the

Directors to build the finest station on the whole line, of course outside the big cities, at Oakvale.

One portion of that communication made some fellows in Oakvale feel pretty well satisfied, for it was hung up where every one could read it who wished. This ran after the following fashion, and few there were in Oakvale who did not know the wording by heart, most of them were so proud of the distinction:

“We desire to state for the benefit of those who may have doubted the substantial benefit of a certain movement that has been sweeping over the land, that one of the chief reasons why Oakvale is selected for the honor of this new and beautiful station is the fact that her citizens have in their midst an organization that has done wonders in improving the living conditions in their town. We refer to the local scout troop; and wish to say that having after a full investigation learned how loyally these boys have striven to do their duty, and served as best they knew how to uplift the community in which they lived, it is our earnest hope that other towns and villages along our line may take pattern of these boys of Oakvale, and hasten to emulate their splendid example.”

That letter was deemed so precious a recommendation that Hugh afterwards obtained the right to have it suitably framed. And to this day it hangs in the meeting-room of the Oakvale Scouts, where any member of the troop will esteem it a privilege to show it to you if you take the trouble to drop around.

Every time Hugh saw Tom on the tennis court swinging that splendid new racquet, he told himself how unsafe it was for any one to judge wholly from appearances, and that he must consider the delightful outcome of that little affair as a never-to-be-forgotten lesson. Circumstantial evidence has hung many a man who was afterward found to be innocent. Hugh shivered to remember how Tom, yes, and he himself, had been condemning Benjy as they might a criminal when, in reality, the other was only working out a noble scheme to surprise his brother.

One thing must not be forgotten. Hugh—believing that Tom, in his spirit of brotherly love, might hasten to buy back those Belgian hares for Benjy, and thus in a measure weaken the spirit of sacrifice, that had made the other sell his pets—went around to the bird store early on the next morning, and purchased the pair of long-eared animals. He planned to keep them for a while, and then let Tom have them to give to Benjy on his next birthday, for by that time the other would have obtained all the good possible from his impulsive action.

Hugh would have liked very well to have told the story for the sake of the great good it might do several other fellows whom he knew. This was not to be considered for a minute, he had too great a consideration for Tom and his brother to think of causing them embarrassment, as most likely they must have experienced had their story become common property.

Hugh had already begun to figure on the summer campaign, knowing that the boys would naturally expect to busy themselves with something useful as well as entertaining. In the end he was able to lay out a plan that he believed would meet with unanimous approval. Since it is about time for me to end this story, there is no need of going into particulars. When the time comes to again write of the Oakvale Scouts' activities we shall expect to enter at length into the new schemes that would naturally enlist their attention. At such date we hope to again meet Hugh and his gallant chums of the Wolf, Otter, Hawk, Fox and Owl Patrols. Until then let it be adieu, but not farewell.

THE END.

Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) See “The Boy Scouts in the Great Flood.”

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