

Catholic Boy Scouts

By BRO. ROBERT LINDSAY, O. P.



THE organization known as the Boy Scouts of America came into being on February 8, 1910, when Mr. Colin H. Livingstone of Washington, D. C., was elected President. For fifteen years Mr. Livingstone has been at the head of the Scouts; and when he recently retired from the Presidency, it was with the satisfaction that he has rendered a truly great service to the boyhood of America. The fifteenth annual meeting of the Boy Scouts' National Council was held in New York City, May 28 and 29, of the present year. The annual dinner and a testimonial to Mr. Livingstone, the election of Mr. James J. Storrow of Boston to succeed him, along with a number of interesting discussions, and a message from Honorary President Calvin Coolidge, were the outstanding features of this fifteenth annual conference.

The meeting this year has furnished us with many noteworthy facts on the Boy Scout movement. It shows us, first, that the ranks have enjoyed a steady, rapid growth. The little band of Scouts that Mr. Livingstone headed back in 1910 is today (May, 1925) a great army claiming a total membership of 6,960,420 hale and hearty American boys, with bright prospects for the future.

After he has reached the age of twelve, any good, clean, honest and worthy American boy, whether Catholic, Protestant or Jew, becomes eligible for enrollment in this splendid organization of youthful America. When we know that one million American boys, a great part of them Catholics, reach the age of a dozen years each calendar year, we can immediately see the possibilities of increased membership. This greater enrollment can be effected admirably by a genuine, whole-hearted support and encouragement on the part of every loyal American citizen. Today there are thousands of our Catholic boys who are hearing the call to Scouthood. These alert lads stand as our hope; they need our attention.

Today's boyhood is to be tomorrow's manhood. There is

nobody who will deny this truth. Likewise, the men who are to represent the Catholic Church in America, eventually, are our Catholic boys of the present. Many of these are already Scouts. But, if they must be Scouts, then it is our duty to see them members of distinctively Catholic troops. A better understanding of Scout activities ought to sufficiently convince intelligent Catholics that such a movement can be safely sponsored. For, as members of Catholic units, the religion of our Catholic boys is safeguarded, while a complete cooperation is maintained with all other troops. Furthermore, we have the firm assurance that "the Boy Scouts of America will exert their best efforts to see that the purpose and policy of the National Catholic Council are fulfilled."

Most of us are familiar with the work of our boys in khaki who represent the Boy Scouts of America. As it would fill a large volume to enumerate the noble achievements of the Scouts, here we must limit ourselves to the more important citations of the organization's Court of Honor. Since 1910, the Court has awarded, according to the report of 1924, medals and certificates totaling 1,044 for life-saving and heroism on the part of the boys, while merit badges given during the year 1924 numbered 149,784. In many of the testimonial letters we read: "Among all the by-standers, this Boy Scout was the only one brave enough to come to my help." During 1924, two Scouts paid the supreme sacrifice in trying to effect a rescue. At first aid work every Scout is a Red Cross nurse.

During Anniversary Week, February 8 to 14, 1924, four thousand American newspapers contributed one column to Boy Scouts, in that week, an open tribute to this great movement, telling us of the work of the boys at home and in the field. During that same year, 532 camps were conducted, and more than a quarter million boys camped out-of-doors, enjoying hiking, swimming, fishing, boating, games, and all the joys of camp life, among the beauties of Nature. In Catholic camps the boys found their priest, who proved their best companion, and spiritual director. In reforestation and conservation the boys plant annually a half million trees, prevent, report and fight forest fires, and protect bird nests and all wild life. For December, 1924, "Boys' Life," the official magazine of the Scouts, reached a circulation of 154,733. The Scouts' Library Department passes on

all books Scouts may read, thus assuring "clean," worthwhile literature, and safeguarding the boys against all books and magazines of questionable character. The library of books at a Scout's disposal, together with the vast library Nature affords him in the great out-of-doors, tends to the better education of the American youth, outside regular school hours. Sea Scouting, winter camping, and the radio have opened up new fields of activity.

But, we cannot dwell long here, telling of past achievements, which, after all, if not directed by proper religious motives, are, at best, purely humanitarian of their very nature. It is to the future we must turn. For, the time has come when Catholic men must act; they are needed to come to the front and help the Catholic Boy Scout movement. The Scout Movement is American throughout. It was the late Theodore Roosevelt who once said, in an address to the Boy Scouts: "I congratulate with all my heart the American people on the Boy Scout Movement; and I want you boys to feel this. * * * You are the team now,—Uncle Sam's Team. You are doing your bit. And I tell you, it is worth while. I do not know a man or boy worth his salt who has not got the desire to be a part of the team that counts, and do his share in making it count. That is what every red-blooded American has got to feel, or he isn't worth being called an American. It is what you boys are doing."

An organization that today claims a membership of American boys touching the tape at so high a mark is certainly worthy of our consideration. The purpose for which this nation-wide movement stands is the betterment of the American boy. It aims to develop virtuous habits and a true, manly character. Before he becomes a Scout the candidate must promise the Scout Oath: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight." The entire Scout Law can be written in a single, significant sentence: "A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent." A Scout is ever faithful to his Oath and Law, "once a Scout always a Scout." If a Scout sins against either, he does so at the risk of surrendering his uniform and badge, and leaving the ranks of Scouthood. The

motto and battle-cry of this splendid army of boys is "Be prepared." This preparedness is "for a Good Turn daily and for every emergency." The Scouts' appeal reaches out to every American boy, and offers countless opportunities for work and play. This is the genius of the movement that stands today as a patent solution of our boy problem, that "the activities which every normal boy craves are utilized in Scouting for the making of a sturdy and manly boyhood, the brightest promise of an honorable and loyal citizenship."

The objection has oftentimes been raised by some Catholics that enrollment in the Boy Scouts of America is harmful to our Catholic boys. If our boys are members of Protestant troops, such an objection is not to be laughed at; but, once it is understood that our boys are to be members of units Catholic throughout, then we can see little reason why enrollment in the Boy Scouts of America should not prove positively helpful to our Catholic boys, during those precious years of boyhood. In this way, Catholic boys will realize that their primary duty is their holy religion, and all other Scout activities will have a more profoundly Christian part in their lives. Every Scout knows and respects his Law, in which we read: "A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful to his religious duties, and respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion." In the Scout meeting, in the Scout camp, in the Scout field, the Catholic Scout stands shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand with the Protestant and the Jewish Scout, all alike true to their Oath and Law, while under the guidance of Catholic Scout Leadership.

To allay further doubts that might trouble Catholic minds, we are pleased to furnish authoritative ecclesiastical approval of the matter at hand. From the Vatican, October 7, 1919, the following letter was forwarded to Mr. Michael J. Slattery, National Catholic War Council, Washington, D. C., and shows clearly the sentiments of our late Pontiff, Pope Benedict XV:

Dear Sir:

The Holy Father has learned with much interest and pleasure that steps have been taken to promote the formation of distinctively Catholic units among the Boy Scouts of the United States; that the movement has the approval and support of His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons, and also of so many Archbishops and Bishops, and that its chief aim is to build up the Boy Scouts spiritually and physically.

Such a movement is deserving of the highest commendation. His Holiness, therefore, wishes it every success and gladly bestows the Apostolic

Blessing on all those who further the Catholic extension of the Scout Movement, under the auspices of the ecclesiastical authorities.

With best wishes, I remain

Faithfully yours,

Cardinal Gasparri (Papal Secretary of State).

On May 13, 1922, Canon Cornette of Paris, founder and chaplain-general of the National Catholic Federation of Scouts, received a similar letter from Cardinal Gasparri, containing the Pope's encouragement and blessing on the Boy Scouts of France. Not long ago, Pope Pius XI spoke thus to a thousand or more Italian Boy Scouts, who had assisted at his Mass: "You are Catholic Scouts, who bring to your exploring work the beautiful and sublime character of the profession of the Christian Faith and the Catholic Life. And so, into what might be termed a pre-occupation, purely material, and in the last hypothesis purely human, you are living in what is the exercise of the Christian Life. A thing which in itself is very beautiful, but which in itself, if of this earth, you turn into an affair of Heaven." In these words we read the Paternal Benediction upon the Boy Scouts, of him who was himself once "just boy," who worked and played together with his companions, from the sunny meadows of his native Italy, up through snow, avalanche, gap and precipice to the loftiest Alpine peaks. With such warm approvals, we must not overlook the fact that our American Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and Priests, all heartily favor the extension of Scouting among Catholic boys.

Today, we find the ranks swelling. There is a constant, growing demand for Scout leaders, particularly for the Catholic boys. These brave lads must have leaders; and they want leaders, not drivers. A Scoutmaster must love boys; he must be a true friend always. For, boys are keen and alert, and easily see through a "sham" leader. The Catholic boys are meeting with splendid cooperation at present through the work being accomplished by the National Conference of Catholic Men, with headquarters at 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, Washington, D. C. The Rev. John F. White is the present director in charge of extension of Scouting among Catholic institutions, and can be reached at Catholic Bureau of Boy Scouts of America, 200 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

In 1924, there were registered at National Headquarters 1,036 troops affiliated with Catholic institutions. Brother Barnabas, F. S. C., is the moving spirit at Notre Dame, Indiana, at

Cliff Haven, New York, and St. Edward's College, Austin, Texas, where courses have been established in Catholic Scout Leadership. Through the untiring efforts of Brother Barnabas, members of the Knights of Columbus have been secured as Catholic Scout Leaders. His is a truly praiseworthy work, for it aims at making Scouting safe throughout for the Catholic boy.

At the headquarters of the National Conference of Catholic Men, in Washington, D. C., a rapid progress in expansion of troops among Catholic boys is expected, if enough Catholic men can be found who are willing to sacrifice a bit of their own time to help our boys in their noble work. Although at present the organization of the Boy Scouts of America employs 700 paid executives and is assisted by 166,000 volunteer workers, the boys, rapidly increasing in numbers, are in dire need of an increased leadership.

The organization of a Scout Troop in a parish is not a difficult problem, when considered. We can find little reason why there should not be a Troop in every parish, with every boy in the parish over twelve a member. The Troop Chaplain will be the Pastor, or a priest delegated by the Pastor, in whom the boys will always find a faithful friend. Four or more representative men of the parish, together with the Chaplain, will form the Troop Committee. A virtuous young man of the parish, over twenty-one years of age, will be selected as Scoutmaster. It is all so simple, after all. But, to our Catholic boys it means so much. It means that they are to be kept away from the "street corner gang," to take the Oath and live the Law of Scouting, and find a clean, wholesome adventure in a living world of activity mingled with rest and pleasures that only a Boy Scout can know and appreciate. In a word, it means that, as a member of a Catholic unit, the Catholic Boy Scout is in his right place.

The command is given and the march is on. What can you, as a good Catholic and a loyal American citizen, do to further this worthy movement? If you do your duty, then our Catholic Boy Scouts will have every opportunity to make of Scouting "an affair of Heaven." They will lay their laurels on the altar of their Church with that same love and devotion as little children, who, returning from the fields, bring their choicest flowers home to mother.

FORWARD THE CATHOLIC BOY SCOUTS!