

Letters to a Rover



D.H. Barber

With a Foreword by Lord Rowallan, Chief Scout

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Editor's Note:

The reader is reminded that these texts have been written a long time ago. Consequently, they may use some terms or express sentiments which were current at the time, regardless of what we may think of them at the beginning of the 21st century. For reasons of historical accuracy they have been preserved in their original form.

If you find them offensive, we ask you to please delete this file from your system.

“Canal Zone” mentioned in this book refers to the Suez Canal in Egypt.

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FOREWORD

I can heartily commend these "Letters to a Rover" not only to members of the Scout Movement but to all young men going out into the world.

There is true wisdom to be found in them, the wisdom that comes from sympathy and the ability to understand the problems which face us all on the threshold of life.

*Rowallan
Chief Scout.*

25 Buckingham Palace Road, S.W.1

1

Dear David,

When you came round for a cup of tea last Sunday I meant to have a serious talk with you about a lot of important things, as it was the last time I would see you before you went to Egypt, but somehow I never got round to it. It was partly because Squiffy and Joe dropped in and started yarning about the ideal site they have found for the Troop camp next summer, and partly because when it comes to the point I always find it difficult to give advice to a young fellow, even a chap like you who I've known ever since he was a Cub.

I feel horribly guilty at letting the chance slip, particularly in your case, as since your parents were killed in the accident I have always felt a special responsibility towards you, and you have always at least *seemed* to value the odd bits of advice I have plucked up courage to give you from time to time.

So that is why, at nearly midnight, I am writing you this long letter. I'm sitting in my old armchair in my room that you know so well, with three walls lined with books (did you ever return Conrad's *Lord Jim*, by the way?) and the fireplace wall covered with photographs of the Scouts I have known since I first became an A.S.M. in 1927. The smaller armchair on the opposite side of the hearth is empty, but I seem to see you sitting there, in various uniforms. First as a Cub, then as a Scout, then as a Senior, then (for such a little while) as a Rover, and lastly as a sapper in Her Majesty's Corps of Royal Engineers.

Do you remember that evening, just after your eleventh birthday, when you were enrolled in the Troop and took the Scout Promise? Old Hankin was the Scoutmaster then, and Pat Williams who died in Korea was your P.L. "I promise on my honour," you said, "to do my best to do my duty to God and the King . . ."

What I meant to talk to you about this afternoon, and what I'm going to write to you about tonight, is the first part of that promise, your duty to God. And in a way I have a clearer field where you are concerned than I would have with some young fellows, because if you were already a member of any Church I should have to be pretty guarded in what I said. Quite rightly, when a Scout belongs to a specific Church, his Scout Leaders are in honour bound not to do or say anything likely to weaken his allegiance to that Church. But you, like so many young fellows today, are what may be called a "vague" Christian, with a careless and (dare I say it?) rather smug contempt for organised religion.

I know perfectly well that you would feel insulted if anybody suggested you were not a "Christian," and I know you intimately enough to be sure that you have always done your best to obey the Ten Commandments and the all important eleventh commandment about loving your neighbour as yourself. If you were sitting opposite me now in that other armchair, pretending to enjoy puffing at that new pipe of yours that doesn't seem to keep alight for five minutes together, I know that at this stage you would say:

"I think a chap can be just as good a Christian without going to church."

Maybe he can, in some cases, but not, I think, in many.

Let me give you my own experience. As a boy I never went to church, or only so very occasionally that the services made no impression on me, but when I was about sixteen a friend of mine induced me to go with him to his particular church one Sunday evening, and within a short time I had become a church member and a Sunday school teacher, and this Sunday school teaching led directly to my becoming a Scoutmaster. For about seven years the church was the centre of my life. I attended morning and evening service, taught in the Sunday school, ran the Scouts, collected for the missionary society and so forth. I think perhaps I almost overdid it, if you can overdo a good thing.

It is all so long ago that looking back I can judge myself in those churchgoing days as if I were another person, and so there is no thought of boasting in my mind when I tell you that in those years I came pretty close to being a real Christian. I had very high standards of right and wrong, and though, being human, I went astray occasionally, I was always fighting to be my best self. If, for instance, on Saturday I did something I knew was wrong, the Sunday services, when I knelt in the presence of my friends and in the sight of God, would remind me again of the standards from which I had fallen, and I would try to make the next week worthier than the last.

Then, when I was about twenty three, I moved to another town and to another job, and for a bit it was physically impossible for me to go to church on Sundays, and in that place I never joined a church at all, and rarely went to any sort of service except perhaps a Scouts' Own or an Armistice Service.

I went on like this for some years. I was still busy helping run Scouts and engaged in other work of a useful character for the community, but I drifted into thinking, as the young fellows of your generation are so apt to think, that "a chap could be just as good a Christian, whether he goes to church or not."

Looking back I can see that my own life proved that this was nonsense. The lack of that weekly reminder of the high standards that Christ demands of His children began to show itself in a gradual falling off in my moral standards. I had never been a teetotaler, and now I found that to make up for the loss of the fellowship I had enjoyed in the church community, I spent more and more of my time in public houses. My new friends were most of them not bad fellows, but they had lower standards: they told dirty stories, and their attitude to sacred and beautiful things was different.

Then the war came and I was swept up in it like everybody else, and in 1944 I found myself an officer in charge of African troops in the Middle East, and the first night I joined them something happened as important to me as what happened that evening when I was sixteen and my pal took me to church with him.

We were in a tented camp at Quassassin, between Cairo and Ismailia, and our officers' mess was a big E.P.I.P. tent, lighted by hurricane lamps. I was playing poker with four other officers, and drinking more gin than was good for me, to overcome my nervousness in the strange surroundings, when suddenly from outside the tent came the sound of men singing a hymn. I knew the tune so well, it was "Jesu, Lover of my soul" and the sound of it took me back over the years to my first day as a Sunday school teacher, sitting with a dozen impish boys in that shabby suburban church.

We white officers were drinking gin and playing poker, and the black Africans from Buganda were singing hymns in their tents, hymns that had been taught their fathers by long dead and forgotten missionaries who had left their bones to rot in Africa for Jesus Christ's sake.

I learned a lot from those African Christians. There were humbugs among them, as there are in the English churches, but the best of them were saints, and it was clear that for most of them Christianity was a living force, as it had been with me in the old days.

Silvester Kikomeko, Alexander Katangala, Christopher Henry Malavu . . . how their names come back to me across the years! Between them they led me back to Christ, and to a renewed belief in organised religion and regular worship. I'm so sure now, and I wish I could help you to be sure, that if you can be a good Christian without going to church, you can be a much better Christian if you have that weekly reminder which regular worship gives you.

You'll be a better man if you link up with a church and worship regularly, and if you "break bread, in remembrance of Him."

So much for you. But the Church of Christ, to me, seems like a great army mobilised to fight all the evil and cruelty and ugliness of the world. I like to think that each denomination of the great Church is like a battalion of that mighty army (and it is all to the good if the members of each battalion think they are the best battalion of the lot!) with its own destined part to play in the battle. Christ needs you in that great army. It would be a very happy day for me if I heard from you that you had done "your duty to God" by joining some battalion of that army. I'd naturally like you to join my own battalion, which I, of course, think is the best, but so long as you are fighting somewhere in the line I shall be satisfied.

Just two final words on this subject, for the fire has gone out and I'm getting cold. Don't be put off from joining an organised church because you find a few humbugs and whited sepulchres in it. They are the ones that somehow catch the public eye, but you can take it from me, having had a long experience of both, that the churchgoer is on average a much better citizen and Christian than the pub crawler or the non churchgoer. "By their fruits ye shall know them," and you'll find that in any town it is the churchgoers that do most of the social and charitable work. I'll never forget that when I was a Scout Commissioner in East London we had thirty five Troops. Thirty three of them were given hospitality by churches, and none by pubs or Agnostic Societies! And before the Government stepped in ninety nine hundredths of the Children's Homes and Old People's Homes were run by regular churchgoers of the despised organised churches.

Do you ever read that Bible I gave you? Fools regard it as an old fashioned book, but in my opinion, and I have struggled through very many thousands of books in my time, the Bible is the most up to the minute blueprint for life of them all. Try reading it right through some time, one chapter a day. Odd bits, of course, are rather dull, but you will be surprised to find how human and thrilling and wise most of it is, and when you get as far as the New Testament I will be very much surprised if you can keep to your resolution to read only *one* chapter a day.

Lastly, let me add that in this letter I have dealt only with the "outward side of the cup." I am not a priest or a parson, and it is not for me to write of the inner meaning of religion, or to analyse faith. All I beg you to do is to give religion a chance in your own life. Go to all the churches and services you can until you find one that calls to your soul, and then seek out the priest or parson and ask him to help you. You'll never find full manhood without religion, and we shan't build the world we want to build until young men like you join Christ's army, openly and proudly.

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

2

Dear David,

Thanks for your long letter from the Canal Zone, and I am glad to hear that your fellow soldiers are “an awfully decent crowd on the whole” because it means, as I have always suspected, that you are rather a decent bloke yourself. I think one of the best of all stories outside the New Testament is the one about the young man who had travelled many weary miles over the desert and arrived towards evening at the gates of a strange city.

“What sort of folk live in this place?” he asked the gatekeeper.

“What sort of folk lived in the city that you came from?” asked the gatekeeper.

Tired as he was, the young man’s eyes lighted up. “They were grand people,” he said, “noble and honourable and kind.”

The gatekeeper smiled.

“Then that’s how you’ll find the people here,” he said. So, if you’ve found friendly faces among your fellow soldiers, I am glad to think it means that you have been friendly and like a good Scout yourself.

Having now buttered you up a bit, however, I will proceed to “tick you off,” because there is one paragraph in your letter that I do not like at all, the paragraph where you criticise the local Egyptian population so sweepingly, saying that they seem to be “a lot of so and sos.”

You have promised to try to obey the Scout Law, and the fourth law, if you remember, tells you to be a “friend to all,” and *all* includes the Egyptians and everybody else. It is not worthy of you, at nineteen years old, and after three weeks in Egypt, to casually dismiss a whole nation as “a lot of so an sos.” No doubt you have taken the opinion at second hand from some of your fellow soldiers, who are perfectly at liberty to hold it, *if they are not Scouts*. A Scout, however, never generalises about a nation or a class or a colour or a creed. He just *mustn’t* say he dislikes Jews or black men or Scotsmen or Sussex men or Income Tax Inspectors or Egyptians. If, after long acquaintance, he finds that an individual Egyptian or an individual Income Tax Inspector is a nasty type, he is quite entitled to say so, but he *must* not generalise.

It is natural for any group of human beings to suspect and be prepared to dislike any other group that differs from itself. That is the basic reason for all wars and all class conflicts and all race conflicts. That is why that fourth Scout law is of such vital importance for peace.

I want you to come back from Egypt with one very precious possession, the memory of *an Egyptian friend*. I imagine that with conditions as they are in the Canal Zone today you have far less chance of fraternising with the local population than we had in the 1939 45 war, but even so you are bound to come into contact with Egyptians, and sooner or later, if you make the best of your chances, you’ll be able to get at least on “smiling” terms with one of them. A smile, by the way, is the only international language that can’t be mistranslated.

When I was in Egypt from 1942 to 1945 I made it my business, as a Scout, to make Egyptian friends. Egyptians were not popular with the British in those days, for though they were not enemies, they were not very warm allies, and they seemed anxious to make as much money as they could out of us soldiers. I used to have to pay four shillings in an Egyptian shop for a seven penny tin of British made boot polish, and, in fact, we were “stung” all round.

Endeavouring to be a good Scout, however, I tried to see a reason for this, and I soon found it in the fact that the standard of living in Egypt was abominably low, so that to them even a British private seemed to be almost a millionaire. We seemed “fair game” to them, just as I am afraid since the war a few needy hotel keepers in England have felt that the Americans were “fair game” for them!

So I managed to forgive the boot polish, and always went out of my way to be particularly pleasant to any Egyptians I met, speaking to them not as a “Lordly white man” addressing an “Arab slave” but as a citizen of a great nation addressing with respect the citizen of another nation that was great when my ancestors wore woad. Speaking to them, in fact, as brother to brother.

I made two friends, an officer in the Egyptian army who had a delicate sense of humour and a great admiration for Shakespeare. and a young chap who worked as a porter at Cairo G.H.Q., who in politics was a revolutionary of the most lurid type. Yet they were both real men, with manly virtues and noble instincts, and when I think of “Egyptians” and am perhaps a bit annoyed at the way their Government is behaving, I remember Yussuf Au and young Mohammed, and hate dies out of my heart.

Don’t ever believe anybody who tells you that any other nation, as a nation, is “impossible.” In the late war we had to fight Germans and Italians, and there can’t be fighting without a certain amount of hate. But no Scout could ever hear without protest what was sometimes said, that “there was no good German but a dead German,” “no good Italian but a dead Italian.” One of my pleasant memories of the war is of a week I spent at Alexandria waiting for the ship to bring me home to be demobbed. I shared a tent with a major who had fought all through the Italian campaign, and we were waited on by a German prisoner who acted as batman, and had also fought, on the other side, all through the Italian campaign. In the heat of the day I used to lie on my bed in the big tent listening to the major swopping yarns with the German batman about the battles they had fought, and yarns, too, about their wives and families and homes arid hopes. When I think of Germans I try to remember that decent kindly batman.

Yes, I think my most precious possessions gathered during the years have been the mental pictures of men of other nations and of other races whom I have discovered to be human like myself.

Get to know one man of any nation really well, and you can never hate that nation again, or despise it.

But the Germans, you will say, were responsible for Belsen, the Kikuyu torture women and children, the Russians . . . yes, I know all that. There is a brute and a God in every man, and every nation has blots on its escutcheon, but friendliness in the Scout way brings out the God in other men, and kills the brute.

And when your travelling days are done, and you come home to England, your obedience to the fourth law must not cease, for harmony at home is just as important as harmony in the greater world.

Even in my own forty odd years of life I have seen that harmony growing. There is not the class hatred that there was at one time: the Churches are working together more than ever before, and even in the political field there is less bitterness than there, used to be.

If our great nation is to play its full part in shaping a better world in this new Elizabethan Age, however, you and your generation must make Britain a still friendlier place. Try and see the other fellow’s point of view, even when you are sure he is wrong, and above all don’t question his sincerity or his motives.

Never let yourself dislike a man because his educational background differs from yours. A silly Etonian looks down on a boy with an elementary school background, and a silly elementary

schoolboy is suspicious of an Etonian because he thinks he has had an unfairly good chance in life. To a real man and a real scout such considerations are not of the slightest importance, because it is character that matters, not the polish on it. Probably the two men who have done most in this century to help Britain retain its place as a Great Power have been Sir Winston Churchill and Mr. Ernest Bevin . . . Churchill went to Harrow and Sandhurst, and Bevin was a farm labourer boy at twelve and delivered groceries on a bicycle at fifteen, but in the War Cabinet no two members had a greater respect for one another. After all, a boy doesn't choose the state of life into which he is born.

Think your Church is the best Church, but remember that Christ the Jew thought highly of a certain Samaritan. If you are an "employee" when you have finished your army service, be loyal to your fellow workers, but try and see the boss's point of view when there is the threat of conflict, and be brave enough to explain it to your pals. If you're a boss, on the other hand, don't forget that being a boss carries a lot of privileges and that those privileges must be paid for by duties properly performed. A good boss who appreciates his workers and gets their trust is worth his weight in platinum.

When you have chosen your political party, too, be loyal to it, but don't forget that your highest loyalty is to be honest, and when your colleagues seem to you to be narrow minded and unfair and bigoted, don't be afraid to put the Scout point of view.

The world would be a better place today if my generation had not spent so much time wrangling over things that didn't matter, and had given all its energies to fighting poverty and ignorance and disease. Make up your mind to leave the world a friendlier place than you found it, and don't forget to get that smile of yours ready for the next Egyptian you meet!

Yours always,
A.D.C.

3

Dear David,

Your letter dated last Wednesday arrived this morning, and I have at last managed to decipher it. The writing is more atrocious even than usual, but as you say it was written in the back of a truck, I will forgive you.

I am glad you have found one real pal in the army. and from your description George seems a good sort of fellow. Army friendships are among the best of all friendships, because they are made at a time when a man has been uprooted from familiar things, and is hungry for someone to fill the gap left by the absence of those he has left behind. Personally I don't think I have ever come much closer to any human being than I did to my own great pal of the early days of World War II. We suffered the agonies of training together in a black cold winter near Andover. I can remember now how loathsome it was to crawl from between the blankets at the sound of reveille, and shiveringly march to breakfast with the prospect of an interminable day before me of digging trenches in hard chalk with blue hands and a sick stomach, and how Peter's jolly smile and gay philosophy used somehow to turn a sordid pilgrimage into a splendid adventure.

I learned in the army something of what Solomon meant when he said that "one man in a thousand sticketh closer than a brother," and that Kipling was not just writing sentimental nonsense when he sang of the friendship that endures "to the gallows foot, and after."

There is indeed between most members of a decent unit in the army a fellowship of loyalty that we might well carry into some aspects of our civilian life. Perhaps, too, in the army, real character shows up more vividly than in the easier conditions at home. The most popular man in a unit is not popular because he is handsome or rich or witty or well educated, he is popular because he is brave and loyal and true. I think that in the "mob" in which I trained the popularity prize would have gone to a Lancashire mill hand named Ackworth, an oldish chap with no teeth and poor physique, but with such an undaunted spirit that when things were at their worst it was always Ackworth who cheered the rest of us up. I remember lying in my blankets on the floor of our cold barrack hut after our first day on "field work." We had been drenched with rain and then frozen and drenched again, and come home aching in every limb to find that something had gone wrong with the cookhouse stove and only a lukewarm meal awaited us. "Old sweats" can take this and worse in their stride, but we were "soft" and newly come from bench and desk, and we felt miserable and cold and ill used. Then old Ackworth, from under his blankets, began to tell us funny stories in a Lancashire accent that you could cut with a knife, and presently the whole thirty of us in the hut were rolling about in a state of helpless laughter.

Ackworth wasn't only full of "guts," he was loyal, and he dreaded that he would be found unfit for the Royal Engineers, and given an easier job. He wanted to "stay with his pals" and refused to "go sick," however ill he felt. He won through, and the day he "passed out" as a fully qualified sapper he wore his flash with the pride that lesser men have taken in donning the crossed swords of a general.

Loyalty sometimes seems to me the loveliest of the virtues, and the loyalest man I ever met was (how did you guess?) an African. His name was Yeseri, a coloured man from Uganda, and he was a sergeant in my platoon doing a job in 1943 in Egypt. We were a Company of three hundred odd coloured East Africans, led by eight white men, and conditions as to food, etc., were very bad. Some of the Africans decided to mutiny, and one of them broke the white Major's jaw with a tent

pole, and a score or so of the others started hurling rocks at the rest of us officers. Luckily the military police arrived before much damage was done, and the ringleaders among the mutineers were arrested.

They had to be court martialled, of course, and we tried to find loyal Africans who would give evidence of the affair, but though all of them had seen what had happened, they became dumb when questioned, for their older tribal loyalty was stronger than their oath to King George.

Then my sergeant Yeseri came to me and said that he had thought it over, and decided that his oath to King George bound him to give evidence, much as he disliked to do it. We took a note of his evidence in a big tent in the camp, and then dismissed him, and a moment later we heard a noise like a zoo in pandemonium outside the tent. I rushed out, to find about fifty African soldiers apparently tearing Yeseri to pieces. Every stitch of clothing was off his back, and they were punching him and kicking him, so that he was covered with bruises and blood.

I took him by the arm and dragged him back into the tent, and we lent him some clothes, and arranged for a truck to draw up outside the tent. Then Yeseri leaped into the front seat next to the driver, and I sat next to him, so that he was protected on both sides, and we drove across the sand through that yelling mob. As we passed through the gates we had to slow down, and a black fist shot past my face and bashed Yeseri on the nose, a parting present to a man whom all the other Africans regarded as a "rat."

When I got Yeseri to the hospital I sat by his bed and told him not to be frightened. "When you're fit again," I said, "we'll transfer you to another Company."

"No, Bwana," said Yeseri, "*I want to go back to my friends . . .* they just didn't understand why I did it . . ."

They had beaten and bruised him and torn the clothes off his back because he did what he thought right, but to him they were still his "friends."

The greater and more dramatic loyalties are not so very difficult for Englishmen to observe, but we are sometimes rather forgetful of seemingly smaller but really equally important loyalties. You know, for instance, that we are all worried about what we call the "decline in family life" and the number of broken marriages and divorces, with all their sad repercussions on the children. Basically, all these things are due to lack of loyalty, and if you marry that nice girl of yours when you get home and are settled in a job, I hope you'll take very seriously your promise to stick by her "for better or for worse, till death do you part."

There are too many people nowadays who say "if a marriage is unhappy, it is much better that it should be dissolved, so that the parties can marry again and find someone that they can be happy with." Don't ever fall for that silly talk. Where divorce is very easy, as in some parts of America, married couples separate because they are passing through a difficult phase that they would survive if they had more patience. Then they marry again, and what happens? In another couple of years they are unhappy again, and get divorced again. I expect you'll laugh at me for saying this, knowing that I'm a bachelor, but the onlooker *does* see quite a lot of the game. If you get married and after a bit find things not going too well, don't *think* of separating, but humbly seek the reason for the *failure* in yourself, and meet your partner much more than halfway. It rarely fails.

Lastly, and perhaps most important of all, is loyalty to parents and those others who have been kind to us in our youth. I had to write an article about an Old Ladies' Home recently, and I chatted to the old ladies, and it made me sick to hear how some of them were treated by their sons. One old lady had a picture of her boy on the mantelshelf of her little bedroom, sitting in the garden of his Australian house with his wife and his own children. "He's done very well," she said proudly. I

asked how often he wrote, and she said “nearly always at Christmas, but he missed last year, I expect he was busy.”

He ought to have been shot. Ten minutes of his time every month would have produced a letter that would have been worth more than the Crown Jewels to that lonely old lady, but he just didn’t bother.

When I hear of sons who are “too busy” to remember their parents, I think of the Master Himself, and *His* mother, and how, as He hung in agony on the Cross. He thought of the woman who would miss Him most, and told John to be a son to her.

The really big men in history have followed Christ’s example in never neglecting, however great their tasks, the folk who were nearest to them. Gladstone and Disraeli, the two men who in turn dominated England in the most important years of the last century, were both careful never to let the fate of nations become an excuse for neglecting their wives, and their happiness at home which resulted from this was a great source of strength to them. There are many dramatic stories about Disraeli, for instance, but I think the most revealing of all things known about him is the fact that when his wife died he found in a cellar sacksfull of his own hair. She used to cut his hair every week and loved him so much that she could not bear to part with even the snippings! Only a loyal man could have been so loved.

Yes, loyalty is a lovely virtue. If people say of you that you’re the type who “never lets anybody down,” you’ll have made the grade.

Yours always,
A.D.C.

4

Dear David

Thanks for your Air Mail written in the N.A.A.F.I. at El Fazid, in which you kindly give me permission to go on sending these lengthy and I am afraid sometimes pompous missives of advice. Most people in this world like giving advice, but only the very wise ones ever take it.

After that bit of flattery I must descend with a bump to give you something of a “ticking off.” I called round on your old aunt last night to see whether you had been writing to her regularly, and I was glad to find you had, but very sorry about one item in your last letter, asking if she could “manage to lend you a few quid” because “things were awfully dear in Egypt and the army pay didn’t go far.”

You didn’t tell her what you told *me* in your last letter, that you “had bought a portable wireless, a real bargain for £8 from Sapper Skilly,” or that you “had rather a headache after a wild night out with the boys in Ismailia,” or that you’d “taken up smoking cigarettes because everybody else seemed to smoke them and it didn’t seem sociable not to.”

There’s nothing morally wrong in buying a portable wireless, of course, if a fellow has saved the money for it out of his earnings, and I’m not enough of a puritan to say that “a wild night out in Ismailia” will be held against you as a major crime at the Last Judgment, and as I smoke myself I can’t tell you that you mustn’t smoke. But I’d like to point out that when I called round on your old aunt she was sitting in front of her electric fire on a very cold evening, and that she had only one “bar” going instead of two because “electricity is so dear.” Also that her supper appeared to consist of a cup of cocoa and bread and cheese and margarine, which she told me “she is trying to get to like, because butter is such a terrible price.”

She did not tell me whether she “lent you the few quid” but, of course, I know that she did, and I also know that it made her very happy to slip those postal orders into the envelope for you. You have meant all the world to her since she took charge of you as a small boy when your parents were killed, and because the sacrifices of love are pleasant, she has never grudged you anything to make you happy.

I don’t suppose you have ever realised how she has gone without things herself so that you could have those little luxuries that mean such a lot to the young. I remember in 1946 when the shares from which her little income comes did not pay a dividend she gave up her own holiday so that you could come with us to your first Scout camp. When you were at the grammar school she had to go threadbare herself so that you could have new blazers before they got shabby, and white flannels for cricket, and all those other extras that help a boy’s pride.

Now that I’ve told you this, don’t you think it was pretty disgusting to ask for that “few quid?” The fact that she enjoyed sending it doesn’t let *you* out. The time has come when you ought to think about giving her a few comforts, instead of expecting her to provide them for you.

You can only hope to do that, however, if you start studying the dullest and most boring of all the ten Scout laws, the ninth, which informs you, with misplaced optimism, that “a Scout is thrifty.” The old Chief (as you’ll remember from that biography of his I gave you when you got your Queen’s Scout Badge) had much need to be thrifty when he was young himself, and all his great triumphs were built on a foundation of personal thrift. A fellow who lives beyond his income will

never amount to anything in this world, because he must always be worrying about money, which is something hardly worth worrying about at all.

In Dickens's *David Copperfield*, which I hope some day you'll read, as it is the third or fourth best book in the English language, there's a character called Micawber, an improvident type like you are yourself at the moment, but his principles are better than his practice, and he says: "Income, twenty pounds, expenditure, nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, result, happiness. Income, twenty pounds, expenditure, twenty pounds and sixpence, result, misery." That is about the truest thing ever said about personal budgets.

In a later letter I'll deal with the moral aspects of drinking and smoking, but here I'm only concerned with thrift, and I'd like you to make a note of these figures. If a chap has two pints of average price beer a day he spends £50 a year on it. If he smokes twenty cigarettes a day he spends £50 a year on them. You're hoping in about four years' time to marry that nice girl of yours, and by that time at the rate I've suggested (which is what we call moderate!) you'll have spent £400 on what are, after all, just opiates to soothe the nerves. With that £400 you could put down a sufficient deposit for a building society to advance you enough to buy a nice little bungalow of your own, instead of going on the council waiting list and after a long time getting a house subsidised by more thrifty people. You could also have enough left over to make down payments on your furniture, and pay for the lot in a short time out of further similar savings. These are startling figures, but you just can't get round them.

If, however, you decide that the social value of drinking and smoking is something worth while, and there is much to be said on that side, then make strict rules for yourself, and keep them. Smoke a pipe instead of cigarettes, and drink only on "occasions" and not as a habit.

About your expenditure generally, I suggest that for one week you write down an account of every penny you spend, and multiply it by 52, to see what that item is costing you out of your annual pay. Then consider what you can scrap without real hardship. I'll bet you'll find all sorts of trivial things on which you've been frittering money away which you can cut out, and in a short time you'll be on the right side. Try and have a bit in the sock when you get home on your first leave to take that old aunt of yours up West to a theatre and a show, treating her as though she were the Queen. That won't be waste, for people who have scrimped and saved all their lives as she has done enjoy occasional luxury as the rich can never do.

There is another aspect of thrift that I must touch on, and that is what I will call Public thrift. Even those who are most careful of their own money are apt to be wasteful when they are using Public money. The army of which you are a part, for instance, spends many millions of Public money, which is lopped off in taxes from the earnings of people at home working in factories and shops and offices. In my day (and I have a nasty suspicion it is still the same) the army was a most wasteful machine. So long as the "rules" were not broken, nobody ever thought of trying to save expense. I've known a three ton truck sent a hundred miles to convey a small parcel, because an officer and a few men wanted a day in Port Said and there was no Welfare transport available. Army money never seemed "real money" and nobody bothered about wasting it. But try and remember that if you waste a gallon of army petrol what you are really wasting is the earnings of somebody at home. Some decent old boy has worked an hour overtime, when he was dropping with tiredness, to earn an extra four bob because he needed the money for a new lawn mower for his garden, and two bob of that has gone in P.A.Y.E. so that you could waste it on army petrol.

Don't ever forget that Public money, in the services or in civil life, is the result of the sweat of somebody's brow.

Finally, let's look at the whole question of money in a larger way. Money is only a token which represents goods and services, and there are two types of blokes in the world, those who spend

more money than they give back in goods and services, who are moral cripples carried by the rest, and those who give more to the world than they get from it, who are those who help to keep the nation solvent and make it great.

Balance your own budget, and don't lean on other people, or on the State more than you can help, and you'll be a citizen who can hold up his head without shame. Or, better still, think of money from the Christian point of view, which is that for any money that comes to us we are Stewards for the Master. If you can in due time get to look at your earnings like that, you'll have no more problems, because you can't possibly spend a penny unworthily when you once realise that every penny you handle belongs to God, for the use of His children at your discretion.

* * * *

I had better enclose a postal order for a pound. After all, you're only young once, and it's fine to be young, though middle age has its points, if you have been thrifty enough to have a bit to spare for an improvident young friend whom, despite his multifarious faults, you still rather like.

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

5

Dear David,

I was wondering which of our ten laws to deal with in my letter to you this month when the postman arrived with yours, and my problem was solved, for you seem to be suffering what somebody has called “the meanest of all vices” self pity, which involves me in the somewhat grim task of writing to you about the eighth Scout law, “A Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties.”

Grim? Yes, because cheerfulness is such an elusive thing that it is harder to give advice about than almost any other human quality. I remember that when I was a rather melancholy youth of seventeen, with all the cares of the universe on my shoulders, an aunt took pity on my condition and gave me for Christmas a little book called (I think) *The Secret of Happiness* which explained, in twelve long chapters, how a man could become so joyful that he went singing gaily about the place. It was the most depressing book I ever read, and when I had finished it I turned to Poe’s *Murders in the Rue Morgue* for light relief.

So I would much sooner not tackle this eighth law at all, but duty urges me on. Our beloved old Chief has said that “a Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties” and the Scout I am interested in at the moment is wetting the sands of Egypt with his tears. Something must be done about it. I picture you sitting in a N.A.A.F.I. all by yourself, looking suicidally into the dregs of your empty mug of beer or, I hope, the tea leaves at the bottom of your teacup. Of course you are alone because we all prefer to be alone when we want to enjoy being miserable. Dr. Johnson, in fact, who suffered from terrible fits of melancholy, thought that being alone was one of the main causes of human misery. “Never be solitary,” he said, “and never be idle.”

So before we go on to discuss the positive virtue of cheerfulness, let’s take a glance at the reverse side of the shield, and think up a few cures for melancholy. In one of my favourite books *The Setons*, written by the sister of the great John Buchan, the authoress says that when she had a fit of the blues she always tackled some particularly dreary and unpleasant job of housework, such as darning a very old pair of socks. I’ve tried this recipe myself with good effect, though I don’t actually darn socks. Not that I can’t darn socks, but I can’t get them on when I’ve darned them, because in some mysterious way when I darn socks I always seem to sort of sew the two sides together, if you see what I mean. Usually, however, I can think of some job that I have kept putting off, such as mending a hole in the fence at the bottom of the garden, or writing to somebody who doesn’t really deserve a letter but expects one, or cleaning the lawn mower. I don’t suppose you have a lawn mower with you in your tent, but I’m sure you can find some unpleasant job, and you’ll feel all the better for doing it.

I think, however, that wise old Dr. Johnson got to the real root of things when he said that idleness and loneliness were at the root of melancholy, for it is only when we are idle and alone that we selfishly turn our thoughts inward, and it is the selfish man who is the sad man.

Let us suppose, then, that you have got rid of your melancholy. How can you then develop positive cheerfulness? Only, in the long run, by developing a right attitude to life, by teaching yourself to value the things that really matter, and not stupid things like riches and popularity and comfort and the praise of men.

Riches certainly never bring happiness. The best you can say for wealth is that it “enables you to be miserable in comfort”. There is a passage in Jerome K. Jerome’s *Diary of a Pilgrimage* which I

always re read when I find myself getting greedy for gold. The Pilgrimage takes the author by the lordly pleasure house where Ludwig, King of Bavaria, spent hundreds of thousands of pounds to make himself happy and comfortable, and became so miserable that he drowned himself in the laic. This reminds Jerome of the happiest person he ever met: “a little shoeblack who used to follow his profession at the corner of Westminster Bridge. Fate gave him an average of sixpence a day to live upon and provide himself with luxuries; but she also gave him a power of enjoying that kept him jolly all day long.

“He could buy as much enjoyment for a penny as the average man could for a ten bob note. He did not know he was badly off . . . the last time I saw him was in St. Thomas’s Hospital, into which he had got himself owing to his fatal passion for walking along outside the coping of Westminster Bridge. He thought it was ‘prime’ being in hospital, and told me that he was living like a fighting cock, and that he did not mean to go out sooner than he could help. I asked him if he were not in pain, and he said ‘yes, when he thought about it.’ He died three days later, like the plucky little English gamecock he was, cheerful to the end. He was twelve years old.”

There’s another story I like, about a man horribly wounded in the 1914 War, lying in a hospital with both legs and arms shot off, and trying to dry the tears of the nurse who looked compassionately at him by retailing a few old army jokes. His last words were “This is the War for laughs!”

The longer you live, and the more you read, the surer you’ll become that cheerfulness comes from inside a man, and has nothing whatever to do with the way Life treats him. You’ll always be miserable if you wait for Fate to bring you happiness on a plate, you’ll start being happy when you open your eyes to God’s beautiful world, that world which poor consumptive R. L. Stevenson said was “so full of a number of things, that we all ought to be as happy as Kings.” Above all, you’ll find happiness when you cease to look for it for yourself, and concentrate on trying to make others happy.

So far I have quoted from books, but looking back on my own life at my gallery of friends, living and dead, I can assure you that the cheerful people I remember were always the “givers” and never the “getters”. I remember two soldiers who trained with me. One was a well educated chap with plenty of money and a nice wife and family and a good job in civil life to go back to. He grumbled at the food, and on a route march he would always develop a limp, and his pal would carry his pack for him. This pal of his was a little wizened cockney, physically frailer than the lazy man. He had been brought up in an Institution and had nobody in the world belonging to him, and in private life he sold what he called “statooettes” in Petticoat Lane. He was illiterate and foul mouthed and got drunk every pay day, but he carried his pal’s pack because he was grateful to have even such a curmudgeon for a friend. He was a giver and cheerful, the other was a getter and miserable. and at Judgment Day we all knew which man’s shoes we would sooner be in. There’ll be a lot of sins forgiven for the man who in life has made a habit of carrying the other fellow’s pack.

By the time you get this letter I expect you’ll have got over your fit of melancholy, but keep it by you and glance at it next time you’re feeling “down.”

“A Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties,” and if you’re really a Scout you’ll not indulge in such a bout of self pity again. But please don’t go to the other extreme and become one of those hearty types who smile and whistle so loudly all the time that they get on other people’s nerves.

Particularly remember this if you come to stay with me next time you’re home. Before breakfast, please, don’t do any smiling or whistling at all. At that time of the morning I am always a bit thoughtful and ruminative (not depressed or full of self pity, of course, but just pondering a little on the sadness of life) and if you try any of your hearty cheer up you’re not dead yet stuff on me there’ll be trouble!

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

6

Dear David,

I am sorry to have delayed a few days answering your last letter, but as Chairman of our District Bob a job Committee I have been going through all the Scouts' cards and analysing them for my final report to the L.A. Quite a fascinating task! I think the Bob a job idea is one of the best we have ever had in the Movement. The cash is useful, of course, the publicity is invaluable, and the work done is a real help to a lot of people, but the great gain seems to me to be that doing the job brings home forcibly to the Scouts the meaning of the Third Law.

There is a type of boy nowadays (and there probably always has been) who regards work of any sort as something just to be got over as quickly as possible, so that he may get back to his play or his idleness. If Bob a job week did nothing else, it would be worth having because it teaches a lot of boys, for the first time, that work is the best play of all.

If we could teach everybody in Britain to take that attitude, what a different nation we should soon become! We need millions more houses and hundreds of thousands of miles of new roads, thousands of new school buildings and factories, and millions of pounds worth of new machinery in the factories if we are to become a hundred per cent materially efficient as a nation, and if *everybody* would 'do the work for which they draw the wage', as Kipling sang. we could startle the world within ten years.

The trouble at the moment is that too many people are thinking of their jobs in terms of money rather than in terms of "service". Not everybody, by any means, for millions are really "putting their backs into it" but enough to make national prosperity remain "just round the corner".

Whatever job you take up when you get home, I hope you'll take pride in doing it better than it has ever been done before. If, when you knock off at night, you know in your heart that you have earned your bread, you'll enjoy your leisure far more than the man who slacks. There are some jobs, I suppose, that are hopelessly monotonous, but I doubt if there are as many as we are apt to think. Most jobs become interesting when you take a pride in them.

One of the most contented men I know looks after a big public lavatory in this town. The white pottery glistens like fine china, the brasswork gleams, and the floor is always clean. He had a young apprentice lavatory looker afterer helping him the other day, and I heard him instructing the boy in the proper care of the imitation marble floor.

"If the mop is too dry," he was saying gravely, "you won't get in the cracks, and if it is too wet you'll leave puddles, and people will tread in them, and in five minutes the floor will be a sea of mud. It's a fine art getting the mop just right."

One felt that one was in the presence of Titian or some other old master, instructing a pupil in his studio, and the comparison is not farfetched at all, for any job done well is a work of art.

It is quite a pleasure to pay a visit to that man's lavatory, but it is not a pleasure to pay a visit to the milk bar on the opposite corner. There are two waitresses, and I do not think either of them was ever a Girl Guide. Even when business is slack there are always a dozen dirty cups and saucers left on the counter, and rings of cold tea, and crumbs and bits of paper. I often walk an extra quarter mile to have my coffee at another milk bar, where a middle aged woman keeps the place speckless. She always looks bright and happy, and those girls always look bored and dull. Nobody has ever told them that work is fun.

Right through the nation's life the same thing is going on. I know the managing director of one big firm who spends half his time in the local Club, drinking double whiskies and saying that his employees are a lazy lot and wages are too high, and that what we need 'to bring the country to its senses' is a few million unemployed.

I know another managing director who works a 14 hour day and seems to know most of his hundreds of employees by name, and who says he has got a wonderful 'team'. He not only pays the proper wages, but gives Christmas bonuses on a staggering scale. To work at 'Brown's' (though that isn't the name, of course) is to be envied, and when a vacancy occurs he can take his pick of two or three good men. People only try to get jobs with the other fellow when there is nothing else going.

Both men are in their early fifties, but the lazy one looks sixty and suffers from severe gastritis. The boss who thinks work fun looks forty and is the best bat in the Works' cricket team.

So when you come back, David, whether you become a clerk or a Cabinet Minister, or a dustman or a Chartered Accountant, try to think more of the job than of the money. Curiously enough, the money almost always follows!

When he framed that Third Law, however, our old Chief was not thinking only of a man's daily work, but of his "after hours" service to the community. If you can use all your time and all your qualities in your "paid" job, then you will probably best serve the community by doing so, but if you can't, then don't waste them.

Much of the strength of English life is due to the voluntary service of individuals of all types. Even in your own brief twenty years you have benefited by a good deal of it. Scouting has meant quite a lot to you, I know, and your various Scoutmasters have not been paid! Nor has the District Commissioner or the L.A. Secretary or the County Commissioner or the A.C.Cs., or any other of the scores of people in Our District who have made your Troop nights and your camp possible.

Then there's the Literary Society you are so keen on. Old Mr. Callender has built that up in thirty years as a labour of love.

The Park, too, where you play tennis, was set aside by the local Council when the town began to grow fast twenty years ago, and Councillor Bagshot and some others had nearly to talk themselves hoarse before they could convince the townspeople of the need for it. Bagshot is dead and forgotten, but there is still a Council manned by unpaid workers who have the interests of their fellow citizens at heart. Don't ever go in for those cheap sneers at Councillors that empty headed people are so fond of making. On the whole they do a wonderful job and they get a lot of kicks and no halfpence at all. Your M.P. is in a different position, because he is paid, but remember that most M.P.s actually lose money by being in Parliament, and whatever Party they belong to are usually inspired by a genuine spirit of service to the community.

We belittle them and despise them, but, after all, we are the purest democracy in the world, and it is the much maligned M.P. who has made us so and kept us so.

Then there are the people who help run local supporting branches of such Institutions as St. Dunstan's, the S.S.A.F.A., the Church Army, the R.S.P.C.A. etc., who help to fill the gaps in the Government's efforts for our welfare, and the welfare of the old, the unfortunate, and the weak.

Don't despise, either, those who run our football and cricket and athletic clubs, the worried secretaries and the always hopeful treasurers, for sport does as much as anything else to keep Britain healthy.

There is an endless field of voluntary service everywhere in Britain, and if you have time and talent to spare you are a "passenger" citizen if you don't play your part.

Naturally as your old scoutmaster I would soonest you made Scouting your leisure time field of service, but the object of the Scout Movement is a wider one than just to breed scoutmasters. We try to breed good citizens of all sorts, and if you feel that you would be more use in some other form of service, good luck to you!

All the same, I hope you'll take a warrant when you come back. I've been many things myself, a politician and a Sunday School teacher and secretary of a Literary Society and a worker in a Boys' Hostel and a lay preacher and other things, but on the whole the time I have given to Scouting is the time I am most sure I have used well. There's so little red tape in Scouting, and it is so practical and yet idealistic, and comparatively cheap to run! And the nearest I have ever come to perfect happiness in this life has been as Scoutmaster of my own troop.

A green meadow and a stream on a sunny day, with the white tents open to the wind, and the voices of twenty boys you've brought from the hot town sounding beneath the blue Heaven. That last precious half hour round the dying embers of the fire as you smoke your pipe and natter with your A.S.M., as the owl hoots from the purple copse and the woodsmoke mingles with the scent of trodden grass. . .

But I mustn't try to persuade you!

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

7

Dear David,

Our letter from hospital arrived this morning, and I am sorry to hear that you have had a dose of sandfly fever. I had it twice myself when I was in the Middle East in World War II, and know how very unpleasant it is.

By the time you get this you will be convalescing, and feeling pretty miserable, I expect. The first time I had it myself I remember that on my discharge from hospital I was sent to a convalescent centre at El Ballah, but I was sent back to my unit after a couple of days because it was just after the battle of El Alamein, and the beds were needed for much more important people. I had been feeling very sorry for myself until I saw those trainloads of wounded arriving, young chaps full of promise and of hope, suddenly laid low and battered and mutilated. Footballers who had no longer a leg with which to kick a ball, cricketers who would never hit a boundary again because their good right arm had gone.

It made me humble and grateful to see the courage with which they faced their fate, and my own imaginary worries receded into the background.

You yourself have always been so fit and healthy that I expect on the whole your bit of sandfly fever has done you good. Health is very much one of those things that we don't value until we lose it, and to be laid on our backs occasionally is a part of the discipline of life.

Sometimes I have thought there ought to have been another scout law "A Scout looks after his health" but on the whole I think the old Chief (as usual) was right in leaving it out, because one of the surest ways of ruining your health is to worry too much about keeping it.

Do you remember the story in *Three Men in a Boat* about the man who felt a bit off colour and went to the British Museum to consult a Medical Dictionary? He thought he might have a touch of bay fever, and when he read the symptoms he was quite sure he had got it.

Then he began idly to turn the leaves of the book. "I forget which was the first distemper I plunged into — some fearful, devastating scourge, I know — and, before I had glanced halfway down the list of premonitory symptoms, it was borne in upon me that I had fairly got it. I sat for a while frozen with horror, and then, in the listlessness of despair, I again turned over the pages. I came to typhoid fever and discovered that I must have had it for months without knowing it: turned up St. Vitus Dance, and found, as I expected, that I had got that too"

Very exaggerated, of course, but with the germ of truth in it that is always found in the best sort of humour. Millions of pounds go into the pockets of patent medicine producers every year because their advertisements are so cleverly written that weak minded people fancy they are ill.

There is no more miserable creature on earth than a hypochondriac, which is the official name for a person whose disease is that he thinks himself diseased, but quite a lot of young people go to the other extreme, and ruin the health that God has given them by not taking elementary precautions to preserve it.

Take the digestive system, for instance, one of the most wonderful of Nature's miracles. Most of us assume that if we swallow all sorts of food our digestive system will deal with it and use it to give us strength for our daily work and enjoyment. When we are young we shovel stuff down without

bothering to think whether it is the right stuff, being sure that our faithful inside will tackle all that comes its way; and in youth it generally does.

Here let me point a sad moral, not for the first time, from my own bitter experience. When I was twenty I was terrifically energetic. I lived at Harrow-on-the-Hill and worked in a bank at Aylesbury, thirty miles away, and my morning train went at 7.15. I rose at 6.30, washed and dressed, and gobbled a breakfast of bacon and eggs at 7, and ran to the station still chewing it. I worked in the bank till 5 or 6 and then gobbled some tea and rushed, with three changes of train, to Bethnal Green, forty miles away, where I ran a scout troop. I gobbled a meal of fish and chips while I changed into uniform and after the meeting was over hastily consumed yet another meal of fish and chips (in those days the staple food of the then fragrant East) and rushed home to Harrow, getting there at midnight, and having a light supper of tinned salmon and cheese and pickles. I then did two hours' study for my Institute of Bankers' Examinations, going to bed eventually at 3 am.

I did this four or more nights a week for several years, putting far too great a strain on what must have originally been a superfine digestive system. I used to laugh at people who talked of having indigestion, and boast of my ability to eat absurd meals at impossible hours. Ten years later, however, I reaped what I had sown, as we always do, and had a miserable period of gastric trouble, when for a short time I became a slave to pills of various sorts. Whatever you do, David, do not ever become a slave to pills or patent medicines! I used to feel a slight pain, and take pill A to cure it; pill A drove away the pain, but upset my inside in another way, so I had to take pill B, which upset my inside in another way, driving me to pill C, which brought the original pain back.

In the end I went to a doctor (only a fool boasts that he never goes to a doctor), and he just advised me to knock off certain items of food for a bit, take a short rest after meals, and get more sleep. My health came back, and I have taken better care of it since then.

Young fellows are inclined to boast, too, that they can get "wet through" time and again without taking harm. They will get soaked in a storm and then dry themselves in their clothes standing in front of a blazing fire, exposing themselves meanwhile to a direct draught, and when they don't take any harm they think they are marvellous. Actually they are laying the foundation of future rheumatism, and are fools. Personally I don't think it does us harm to get thoroughly soaked, so long as we keep our circulation going until we are able to get dried and changed, but don't ask for rheumatism or rheumatic fever. They are very unpleasant.

We are all made differently, and only experience can teach us the best rules of diet and health for ourselves, but a good general rule is to "be moderate in all things." To eat too much is worse than eating too little, and to take too much exercise is certainly as bad as taking too little. Many people in office jobs, however, are never really healthy because they do not take regular exercise. Even at the busiest times of your life, make sure that you give your whole body a good "shaking up" regularly each week. I have found on those happily rare occasions when I was working a 70 or 80 hour week glued to an office stool that I could still keep perfectly fit if I had just two hours of hard games of tennis on Saturday afternoons. Better still, perhaps, for it refreshes mind as well as body, is a regular weekly 20 mile walk in the country.

What about smoking and drinking? Whatever I say on this subject will lay me open to a storm of abuse from one school of thought or another, so I want to emphasise that this is only my own opinion, based on experience and observation.

Very moderate smoking I think does no harm to health, but you should always regard it as a luxury for occasional enjoyment. As soon as you begin to get to the stage when you can't settle to a job without a cigarette it means that nicotine has mastered you, and you must cut it out, for the chain smoker or the near chain smoker is a miserable creature, who only leads a dim, drugged life. Probably the man who gets most enjoyment out of tobacco is the man who only smokes a pipe and

never lights it till the day's work is done. I have a feeling that if I had trained myself properly when I was younger I might have achieved this myself.

Moderate drinking, too, does not seem to harm health, but the trouble with drink is that the young man who drinks moderately far too often becomes the middle aged man who drinks immoderately. The Total Abstinence Societies (and don't ever scoff at them!) usually call attention to the evils of drink by talking of drunkards and broken homes. It is a great tragedy that drink very occasionally leads to such excess, but from a national point of view I should say that the real tragedy of drink is that literally millions of decent citizens, while not becoming drunkards, come to regard drink not as a luxury but as a regular necessity.

What do you want to be like at forty five? Fat paunched and just a little bloated of face, and unable to go into a bar for one drink without having two or three? If you don't want to be like that, then watch yourself very carefully, and if drink begins to master you, cut it out!

The body is the temple in which the soul God gave us dwells during our earthly pilgrimage. It is bad for the soul to let the temple get into disrepair by greed, or lust, or carelessness.

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

8

Dear David,

Thanks for your letter received this morning. You seem to have been let down badly by your “friend” Harold. It is certainly annoying to lend a man a couple of pounds to help him out of a nasty hole, as he tells you, and then to find that he has been transferred to another unit, taking not only your two pounds but a lot of further sums he has borrowed from other people.

The whole business of lending money is very difficult. Shakespeare, as you probably remember, advises against it, saying very truly that “loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.”

Shakespeare was a very wise man, but there is a higher wisdom even than his, and in the New Testament we are given opposite advice: “Give to them that ask of thee, and from them that would borrow of thee, turn not away.”

As you go through life you will many times have to make the decision “to lend or not to lend”, and from a rather mixed personal experience I can give you a few tips that may be useful. To begin with, I think you have to decide whether you have a right to lend any particular sum of money. If you are a married man with a family, for instance, there cannot be any doubt that your first duty is to them, and that only in cases of great emergency ought you to risk money that really belongs to them.

It is rather different if you have no responsibilities, because then you yourself are the only loser if you are let down.

Looking back on my own youth, I think I must have been rather weak minded about money, because when I was quite young and in my first job two much older men borrowed from me, and both let me down. The first came to me and said that he was behind with his rent, and unless he could get hold of five pounds at once his cruel landlord would throw his wife and children into the street. I was so moved by this tragic picture that I lent him the five pounds (saved out of my wages of £1 a week!) and was afterwards chagrined to find that he had used it, not to pay his rent, but to spend the Sunday at Brighton with somebody else’s wife! Although he was earning big money it took me nearly a year to get my five pounds back. A couple of years later another man who worked in the same office as myself came to me to borrow £20, because his wife was desperately ill. This time I made careful enquiries, and found that the illness was quite genuine. As he also showed me papers proving that he had £30 due from an Insurance policy in a fortnight, and promised to pay me back out of this, I lent him the money.

A month later I asked him what had happened, and he thanked me, and said his wife was better, but she was very depressed at being alone all day, so he had spent the £30 from the Insurance policy to buy her a dog to keep her company, but would settle with me “sooner or later”.

Once, however, I had a quite opposite experience. It was when I was about thirty, and the world was going well with me. I was more prosperous than ever before or since, and one day I read in the Agony Column of an Evening newspaper a two line advertisement saying that the advertiser was in desperate need of financial help.

Some odd impulse made me answer it, and in reply came a long letter. The writer said that he was an ex soldier, and a barman at an inn on the South coast. He was also Treasurer of a Slate Club. About a month earlier a customer had told him that a certain horse was going to win the 2.30. On a

sudden impulse the silly barman “borrowed” £5 from the Slate Club money, and put it on the horse, which lost. In panic, he put £5 on another horse, which also lost, and by the time he wrote to me he was short of £25 and the share out was due next week, when he would quite certainly go to gaol.

He was a self confessed gambler and thief, and there was nothing in the story to arouse the slightest sympathy, yet there was something curiously simple and honest in the way he told it, so, though still very dubious, I wrote to the Methodist minister in the town where he lived and asked him to have a chat with the barman and give me his impressions.

The minister wrote back and said that the barman seemed really sorry for what he had done, and added: “Although I can’t advise you to advance the money, I must say that the young man impressed me as being honest, despite what he has done. He says he will pay you back at 10s a week, but you would, of course, be taking a great risk.”

It was just before Christmas, and the advice of Shakespeare seemed at the moment less worth following than that other advice, so I sent the money, feeling a moral certainty that I would never see it again. I was wrong. The barman sent me a 10s postal order every week for fifty weeks, and on the fifty first week he sent £1, saying that he felt it only right to pay interest on the loan.

I never met him, but he wrote regularly until World War II came, and the last I heard of him he was happily married with three children and a business of his own. The truth was, that he was a naturally honest man who had made one slip. The two men of my earlier acquaintance who let me down were naturally dishonest men who were careful not to make slips that would put them in reach of the law.

Our attitude to money is important, and the longer I live the less surprised I am that our old Chief made ‘a Scout’s honour is to be trusted’ the first law of all. Honour, of course, included many things besides money honesty, but money honesty is very important, and we have no room for ‘crooks’ in the Scout Movement. If later on you take a warrant, as I hope you will, don’t ever compromise on this question of money honesty. I don’t think you would ever be tempted to be dishonest yourself, because I’ve known you long enough to be sure that you are naturally “straight” and had good home training, but when you become a warranted officer it is your job to see that the financial affairs of your Group are in apple pie order.

Very many years ago I helped in a Group where the G.S.M. was a crook, and those months were the most miserable of my life. It was before the days when most Groups had Group Committees to look after finances, and the G.S.M. handled all the money himself, from the scout’s weekly subscriptions to the proceeds of jumble sales. We all had an uneasy suspicion that he was clipping into the funds, but we did not think of him as a crook, we just told one another that he was a bit careless. He was only about 25, and one of those charming happy go lucky types, and the thing went on for months before we could pluck up courage to tackle him, and when we did he broke down completely and admitted that he was £15 “short” but that he hadn’t the slightest idea where it had gone. He supposed he must have got his own money and the Group’s mixed up.

Very foolishly, instead of reporting the matter to the Commissioner, we clubbed together and paid the £15, thinking ourselves very noble and Christian. I left the town soon afterwards, but two years later I saw in the paper that the same man had gone to gaol for a fraud on his firm, bringing disgrace not only on himself but on the Scout Movement, of which he was still a leading light. Those of us who “covered up” his crime seem to me to have had a part in his guilt.

Why, you may ask, am I proud to have helped a barman who had stolen, and ashamed of having helped a Scouter who had stolen? At first glance it seems inconsistent, but it is not. If Scouting means anything in the world, it means that we Scouts set ourselves a standard of honesty and decency above the average standard of our times. Members of the Movement in positions of

authority who flagrantly ignore the Scout law must be expelled from the Movement, or the Law and all we stand for is a sham and a hypocrisy.

Sentimentalists will ask how this can be reconciled with Christian charity and Christian forgiveness. They will point out that Christ forgave even the woman taken in adultery. True, but though as a woman she was forgiven when she repented, it would have been quite wrong for her to immediately assume office as Chairman of the Palestine Women's Purity League.

The proper course to take, when you find yourself in possession of evidence that suggests that a fellow officer is breaking this basic law of honesty is to tackle the fellow himself, hard as it may be to do so. If he does not satisfy you, you must go to his immediate superior, and if the case is proved he must leave the movement and be "blacklisted" at H.Q. That being done, by all means club together to put things right.

I am afraid this has been rather a harsh and disagreeable letter, but nations that become corrupt are doomed, and without honesty any community will crumble. Movements like ours that profess a high standard must preserve it, "for if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?"

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

9

Dear David,

Thanks for your letter acknowledging the book I sent you about the life of Lord Shaftesbury. I'm glad you managed to wade through it to the end and that it made such an impression on you. "Ordinary people couldn't have had very tender consciences in those days," you write, "to let children of seven years old work in factories for long hours and in horrible conditions."

Looking back into history the same sort of idea has often occurred to me myself. Take the slave trade, for instance. For a century or more British seamen were buying coloured men and women and children in Africa, battenning them down in the holds of ships, and taking them across to America for sale. Thousands died on the way after terrible suffering, and all the time in England ordinary people were eating their dinners and singing hymns and playing cricket, only a very few seem to have worried about the slave trade.

The answer is, of course, that this apathy is due not to lack of conscience, but to lack of imagination. Once men of imagination and eloquence took up the cause and made the public realise the human suffering that the slave trade entailed, the ordinary people rallied round them, and a terrible blot was removed from our national life.

What I'm writing to you about this month, however, is not children in factories, or slaves, but animals. The sixth scout law tells us that "A Scout is kind to animals", but it is not a law which we often bother much about, except in a negative way, and though I know you are not particularly interested in animals, I want you, just for once, to think seriously about the subject, because as a citizen you have a share in the responsibility for the way we treat animals in this country, and I don't want you to evade your responsibility through sheer lack of imagination, as those ordinary citizens in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries evaded their responsibility for the slaves and the factory children.

"It isn't our business" they probably said if they thought about it at all, but I don't want you to say that it isn't your business when animals are brutally ill treated in the enlightened England of 1954. I have lately been making a list of a few actual cases. Here are some of them:

A 14 year old schoolboy tied a frog by the back legs and held it, alive, over a fire, until it was dead. The boy was absolutely discharged on payment of 4s costs.

A donkey was tied to the back of a car and dragged along for 100 yards with legs splayed, leaving a trail of pools of blood. The owner was fined £5 and paid £7 14s 6d costs.

A farmer was prosecuted for the seventeenth time. In 1948 he was fined £5 for causing unnecessary suffering to sheep, in 1950 he was imprisoned for causing unnecessary suffering to 20 pigs. A year later he was prosecuted for causing unnecessary suffering to 22 pigs. Even when a man like this has proved himself completely unfit to be allowed charge of dumb creatures, there is no law to prevent him having charge of them.

A man saw a cat coming out of a shop, picked it up by the tail and flung it high in the air. He was gaoled.

Another man threw a kitten into an oven and baked him alive.

These are just a few of thousands of the sort of cases that occur every year. But what, you may ask, can you do about it? If you were there in person when these things were done you would try to stop

them, and try to see that the perpetrators were punished, but usually you can only help by proxy, that is to say, by subscribing to one of the animal societies who are working to stamp out this sort of thing. Most of these cases, as it happens, were brought to light by the R.S.P.C.A., but there are other societies doing equally good work. Don't you think that for the sake of the sixth scout law you ought to subscribe to one of these societies, or at least, when they have flag days, to put half a crown instead of a penny in the box?

About those cases of plain cruelty there can of course be no controversy. but some of the other aspects of the way we in England treat our animals are highly controversial and need thinking about. As a Scout, bound by that sixth law, you can't dodge coming to a decision on them.

Consider the question of fox hunting and stag hunting. Are these sports cruel? You yourself must make up your own mind after listening carefully to the arguments on both sides.

From time to time, also, certain topical questions about animals come up, and in the arguments about them you must take your part as a Scout and a citizen. Four horses, for instance, were killed in one year's Grand National at Aintree. Immediately there was a demand from a certain section of the public that the Grand National should be abolished, together with all similar steeplechases. Others suggested that the course should be made easier and the regulations revised to make sure that only exceptionally strong and fit horses were entered. What do you think about this?

Another topical question at the moment is about a rabbit disease called myxamatosi, which has lately greatly reduced the number of rabbits here, where they are a serious pest destroying millions of pounds worth of crops every year. There are three schools of thought. School A says that the disease is so painful that it ought to be stamped out or at least localised. School B says that it is nature's way of keeping down the rabbit population, and should be allowed to take its natural course. School C says that we are justified in artificially spreading the disease in order to get rid of rabbits wherever they damage crops. What's your view about this? So long as crops are saved does it bother you that millions of rabbits die in excruciating agony?

You must at least study all these questions. If in any case you genuinely cannot make up your mind as to which side is right, you are justified in 'sitting on the fence', but for apathy through slackness there is no excuse.

The apathy of the British public towards the treatment of animals is appalling, as is clearly shown when an Animal Bill, even a non-controversial one, comes up in the House of Commons.

I had a personal experience of this twenty years ago, when as a young man I took part in a campaign to prevent the export of old war horses to the Continent. Hundreds of horses that had helped win the 1914 War, too old and broken to be permitted to do any sort of work in England, were being shipped under horrible conditions to certain Continental countries, and worked to death in a way that would have led to immediate prosecution in this country. It was a clear case of wicked and unnecessary cruelty, but it took years to get enough public support to get the Bill through the Commons, though it was done eventually. The little part I played in helping get that Bill through is one of the things in my life that I am proudest of, because personally, like you, I'm not really interested in animals, any more than those forbears of ours were interested in slave ships. I just lent a hand because I was a Scout, and I hope you'll do what you can for our dumb friends, for the same excellent reason!

I hope, too, if you should become a Scouter when you get home, that you will never let those under your charge forget the sixth scout law, just because you yourself are not particularly interested in animals. You'll probably have scouts in your troop or cubs in your pack who own dogs and cats, and it will be up to you to see that they treat them properly, and understand how to look after them.

Parents who know nothing about animals themselves often buy puppies or kittens or rabbits for their children, and imagine that the children will know how to look after them by instinct. Too often the small boy starts by half killing his pets with kindness and then gets tired of them and neglects them. If (like me) you are not an expert on the care of pets yourself, you ought to invite somebody who is to come down and give an occasional yarn on the subject to your troop or pack.

At the same time, if you're not fond of animals, why not try to get to know more about them yourself? Visit the local branch of the P.D.S.A. or the local Lost Dogs' Home, and if you're human, which I hope you are, you'll find yourself getting interested.

Be sure that the knights of old treated their horses with care and consideration, and we in this mechanical age must not fall below the standard they set in chivalry towards the animals who serve us, and whose happiness depends entirely on the mercy of man.

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

10

Dear David,

Thanks for your letter about the cricket match. Sorry you made a “duck” but glad you didn’t hesitate immediately to accept the umpire’s decision, even if you were absolutely certain you never touched the ball. Even in cases where everybody on the field knows that the umpire is wrong, a batsman who shows annoyance just isn’t a cricketer. I hope, too, that you walked back with a smile, because that’s part of the courtesy of the game. I think that that peculiar place that cricket holds in English life is due to the fact that it is the most “courteous” of all popular games, being governed not only by written laws, but by all sorts of Unwritten Ones which everybody observes. Just occasionally we get a rumpus like the Body line controversy, but on the whole the standard of cricket sportsmanship is very high, and when you hear the phrase “it isn’t cricket” you know exactly what it means.

There are unwritten laws in the game of life, too, and the courteous man is the man who obeys them as carefully as he obeys the written ones. Once again you must turn to the New Testament for the best advice. “if a man compels you to go with him one mile,” said Our Lord, “go with him two miles.”

I have heard a lot of Scouters give talks to their boys about the Fifth Law, and I have noticed that they usually start with the same phrase: “Courtesy isn’t just a matter of giving up your seat to a lady in a bus or train.”

Of course that is true enough. Courtesy goes much deeper than that, and yet I am not at all sure that the “giving up your seat” illustration is such a bad one after all, because in it are all the elements of true courtesy.

You *must* pay your fare, and you mustn’t spit or pull the communication cord except in cases of emergency, but giving up your seat is an entirely voluntary act, and the basis of courtesy is that it is doing something “extra”.

Next, the act is unselfish, because it is much more comfortable sitting down than standing up, and your action means that somebody else’s comfort is more important to you than your own.

Next, it requires moral courage, and the best sort of courtesy always requires moral courage. Of course, David, you have often given up your seat to a lady, and so have I, but do you always do it? Or do you (like me) occasionally glue your eyes to your newspaper, and pretend not to notice that there are ladies standing? Do you (like me) make various excuses to yourself, such as that you have had a very tiring day, or that you’ll be getting out soon, anyway, or that there are a lot of other young fellows occupying seats, and you don’t see why it should always be *your* job to give up your seat, or that women ought not to travel in the rush hour, or that now that women claim equality with men in so many spheres, they ought to be treated equally as regards seats in trains and buses? I expect those are the excuses you make, but none of them is quite good enough. God made men and women different, and the ancient instinct that made men chivalrous to the sex that bears the children of the race is a right one.

At various times in my life, as I have confessed, I have fallen from grace in this respect, but I have tried to pull myself up by a very simple expedient. I have resumed wearing a scout badge. The fact that the public knows a scout is supposed to be courteous, and the feeling that I should be letting the Movement down if I *didn’t* give up my seat, has just swung the balance. I hope you’ll always

wear a Scout badge, David, even if it is an Old Scout badge. You'll find it will help you in other things besides courtesy.

Have you ever read *Cranford*, by Mrs. Gaskell? It is a queer old fashioned book written in the middle of the last century, and though it is no "thriller" I don't think you would be bored by it, because the people in it are so real. One character, Captain Brown, is probably the most courteous man in all literature. He is a poor half pay officer living in a village inhabited mostly by elderly widows and spinsters, and at first they resent his loud voice and his lack of pride. On the way home from Church on Sunday he sees a shabby old woman carrying her dinner home from the bakehouse, and the tray is too heavy for her, so he raises his hat to her as if she were a Queen and takes the tray from her hands, and marches home by her side, chatting affably, while the "fashionable" people in their Sunday silks look on with horror. I hope you'll get to know Captain Brown, because his life is an education in true courtesy.

Courtesy is not a noticeable quality, but discourtesy is very noticeable indeed, and adds much to the discomfort and ungraciousness of modern life. We all know those people who drift into a cinema in the middle of a picture and chat for four or five minutes before they get interested, or who argue in a loud voice with the attendant about which seat they want, destroying the pleasure of everybody else because they are thinking only of themselves.

Then there are the litter fiends, who drop pieces of paper and cigarette packets and make our streets and our lanes the untidiest in the world. The courteous man carries his own rubbish home with him, or puts it in a litter basket. Then there are the people who have their radio blaring all day and half the night, disturbing their neighbours, and the people with cars who go to collect a friend and are too lazy to get out and ring his front door bell, so they hoot on their horn until he comes out.

These are all manifestations of discourtesy, and the reason for them is the same in all cases. The offender is interested in his own enjoyment and does not bother whether other people enjoy themselves or not. The courteous man wants to enjoy life to the full himself, but it is not in his nature to enjoy it at the expense of others.

I think you know me well enough to be sure that I don't crack up "the good old days" for the sake of doing it, but I don't think there is any doubt that there is less personal courtesy between man and man than there used to be, and that the value of politeness is today much underrated. People are very slack about answering letters, for instance. There is only one safe rule about correspondence . . . and that is to answer every letter on the day it is received. Once you put it aside it will hang about unanswered for weeks.

People are careless about keeping appointments, too, and when they don't turn up never seem to think it necessary even to apologise. They were more particular in Victorian times, and one man wrote to a friend who had failed to keep an appointment: "I hope you are dead, as that is the only excuse I can accept."

Courtesy makes life more graceful and pleasant, and in 1942 when I was in the army I had a striking example of the difference between the manners of past and present which I have never forgotten. I was stationed at Kidderminster, and one morning two letters arrived for me, one from a scout of Our District who happened to be lodging in the neighbourhood and the other from Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, who had been three times Prime Minister of England.

Both letters were invitations to tea. The scout wanted to talk about old times, and Earl Baldwin wanted to chat about a pamphlet I had written and which happened to have come into his hands.

On the Saturday I went to tea with the scout. He seemed quite surprised to see me.

"I'd clean forgotten it was today you were coming!" he said, "how silly of me!" He rustled up some tea and chatted in desultory fashion for half an hour, but he kept looking at the clock, and

presently confessed that he was “expecting a fellow, on business, and he had some figures to get ready before he came.”

I took the hint, and he did not even show me to the door. “I expect you can find your way out,” he said.

That was an extreme case, but I remembered it next day when I called on Lord Baldwin. For nearly twenty years he had been the most important man in England, and I was a second lieutenant and a stranger, but for two hours we chatted, and he somehow managed to make me feel that I was the most interesting man he had ever met. There was no servant present when Lady Baldwin joined us for tea, and the old statesman waited on us himself, bringing the tea and cakes from a side table and refusing my offer of help because I was his guest. When I left he saw me to the gate and twenty yards down the lane, to make sure I did not miss my road.

Lord Baldwin became unpopular politically before he died, but I shall always think of him as a courteous gentleman. Yes, we in 1954, if we can learn nothing else from the Victorians, can well learn the value of good manners, which are the outward sign of a courteous spirit.

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

Dear David,

I am sorry to learn from your last letter that you have a black eye, earned in a quarrel over politics with a “pig headed idiot”. While I am glad that you are at last taking politics seriously, I cannot admire your method of trying to make your opponent see reason. However keen you are on your own ideas, you must learn to respect the ideas of others, and you are a poor sort of Englishman if you cannot argue about politics or anything else without getting violent.

Years ago I remember sitting next to a foreigner at a big dinner in London. He came from a country which we are all inclined at times to envy, but he had so fallen in love with England that he had decided to make his home here. I asked him what he found so attractive about us, and he said it was our “tolerance”.

“Take this dinner, for instance,” he said, “There’s your Prime Minister sitting at the top table, and next to him is his mortal enemy, the Leader of the Opposition. I’ve been watching them most of the time, and they’ve been chatting away as if they were the best friends in the world. That they should be polite to one another in their public speeches tonight isn’t so wonderful, as it might be just a ‘front’ but you’ve only got to watch them when the spotlight isn’t on them to know that despite their wide political differences they respect one another. That sort of thing couldn’t happen in my country.

Political life in this country is very far from perfect, but it is a fact that the tolerance that we British have developed through the centuries usually keeps political enmity from developing into hate, and we reap the rich reward of this at times of great national crisis, when the leaders of all parties are able, because they respect one another as individuals, to work together for the common good.

“Tolerance,” wrote John Morley, “means a reverence for all the possibilities of truth, it means acknowledgment that she dwells in diverse mansions, and wears vestures of diverse colours, and speaks in strange tongues . . . it means the charity that is greater than even faith or hope.”

John Morley was a Victorian, and wrote in the eloquent language of his age, very different from the more pungent and snappier English we use today, but what he said about tolerance is worth digesting, for tolerance is one of the finest flowers of civilisation. If we British ever lose our tolerance, we will lose a lot of other good things, too.

Most fellows of your age are so used to the tolerance in our national life that you accept it as you accept the sunshine, and imagine that it is almost as old as the sunshine. Yet if you read the history books you will find that it has only been won, bit by bit, through the generations, and this applies particularly to religious tolerance, the most precious tolerance of all.

Until the Toleration Act of 1689 Nonconformists were often imprisoned for worshipping God in their own way. Until 1829 Roman Catholics could not sit in our House of Commons, and Jews were not admitted until 1859, and “freethinkers” until 1886.

Perhaps you think these facts dull, but they mean a great deal, and among other things they ought to mean that we must be tolerant in our attitude to other nations which are not yet so far along the path of tolerance. We in Britain have been a “stable” nation for nine hundred years, free, at least, from foreign invasion, and able to develop gradually a tolerant democracy. Many nations in the world today have only just begun to grope their way along the same path, and we must not despise them in their struggles.

We shall not make them tolerant or wise by fighting them, any more than you made your fellow soldier wise by giving him a black eye. A bit can be done by precept, but much more can be done by example, and that applies equally to men and nations.

Never, however, let your tolerance degenerate into a mere sloppy lack of principle. I was travelling on a country bus in Shropshire last week, and a mother got in with two children, a boy and a girl about five and six. They each had tin trumpets on which they tooted unceasingly. They had a ball which they threw to one another across the bus. They scrambled over and under seats, annoying the other passengers, and at last an elderly lady complained to the mother.

“They are only young once,” said the mother with a complacent smile. So the elderly lady complained to the conductor.

“Live and let live,” he said, “that’s my motto!” The attitude of the mother and the conductor might have been mistaken for tolerance, but it was just sheer laziness. Those children would almost certainly grow up to be thoroughly bad citizens, because they were not being taught in their youth to be considerate to other people.

We should never allow tolerance to be an excuse for neglecting our duty to those for whom we are responsible. I actually once saw a scoutmaster taking some scouts by train to camp, and one of the small scouts took a knife out of his pocket, with a screwdriver attached, and unscrewed the ashtray under the window, putting it up on the rack. I asked him why he didn’t stop the boy, and he said that he couldn’t be bothered! That was certainly an extreme case, but I think a lot of us at times neglect our duty to those in our charge so that we may be called “a good sport” instead of a “fuss pot”.

It is that same desire to be thought to be tolerant that makes us sometimes listen to dirty stories, and even to snigger at them, instead of showing clearly that we do not like that sort of thing.

The same weakness showed itself just after the war when the “black market” was at its height. A fellow would boast that he had got a pound of butter “on the side” from “an old pal” and we would remain silent with imbecile grins and let him go on thinking he had done something clever, when he had really, of course, just joined the great army of cheats and thieves who were keeping women and children all over the country shorter of butter than they need have been.

No, there can be no excuse for tolerance of dirt or dishonesty. Tolerance is a spiritual quality, and should be applied to things of the heart and mind. So long as another man is struggling for truth, we must be tolerant towards him, even if we totally disagree with his ideas.

Tolerance should also enable us to judge others with charity, because we do not know the difficulties and temptations of others as we know our own. Tolerance kills in us that Pharasaical self righteousness, against which we read in the New Testament that Christ warned us again and again.

He gave us the cure for self righteousness and the recipe for tolerance when He told us to “remove the beam from our own eye before we tried to remove the mote from our brother’s eye,” and the world would be much freer of quarrels and wars if we all took that to heart.

The trouble is, of course, that it is human nature to make light of our own faults and make excuses for them, but few of us have enough imagination to find reasons for the apparent faults of others. You find this illustrated on a great scale in the attitude of our newspapers to the problem of maintaining law and order in the territories for which we and others are responsible. If we shoot down thousands of our fellow citizens in Kenya it is a “military operation against terrorists”. I happen to know a good deal about Kenya, and I know that the shootings have been necessary, tragic as they are. If, however, the Russians were obliged in defence of law and order to shoot

down thousands of their fellow citizens in the Ukraine, we can be sure that every newspaper in England would automatically describe it as a “massacre.”

Do not imagine from my saying this that I have become a Communist. This attitude of one nation to another is much older than political Communism. While I am on the subject, however, I must just say one word about Communism and the Scout Movement. If we Scouts are to be tolerant, why can't we tolerate Communists in our ranks? The answer is quite simple. The only thing we may not tolerate is intolerance, and Communism is intolerance gone mad.

I hope you'll make friends with the fellow who gave you the black eye. Next time, instead of knocking him down, try listening to what he has to say.

If you can find even one or two of his ideas that you agree with, and tell him so, you'll probably be able to persuade him to agree with one or two of yours. If you can make your peace with him, you'll be helping to stop the dropping of the first H-bomb, for peace between nations will never come until there is tolerance between man and man.

Yours ever,

A.D.C.

12

Dear David,

This will be the last long letter I shall write to you, as you tell me you have been posted home. Your two years in the army must be nearly up, and you will soon be a “free man” again. I am glad that you are able to say that on the whole you don’t regret your time in the army, and I can tell from the tone of your letters that the experience has done you much more good than harm, and that you are going to be a better citizen because of it.

All the same, I know that it will be a very happy day for you when you are once again “Mr. David” instead of “Corporal David”. To the professional soldier I suppose the restrictions of army life are accepted happily as part of his job, but to the civilian in uniform I know from experience how irksome they can be. All the more credit to you and your generation that you have accepted peace time conscription so cheerfully, giving two years of your young lives, with remarkably few grumbles, to protect that very personal freedom that you surrender when you don Her Majesty’s uniform.

The day I was myself demobbed, just before the Christmas of 1945, was one of the happiest of my life. I had been nearly four years in the Middle East without any home leave, and I loved England with a great love as I saw her cliffs again from the deck of the cross channel steamer that had brought us from Dieppe.

We went by train to Aldershot, and we had a wildish sort of party that night, a hectic, rather overexcited party, so that we woke next morning, the morning of the great day, with headaches. Silly of us, wasn’t it?

Then came the formalities of demobilisation, and the parting from old friends whose value was at last fully realised with the final handshake. Then I was free! No need any longer to wonder whether I was “properly dressed”. No need any longer to look for Out of Bounds signs or to salute or return salutes in the streets. No need to get a late pass if I wanted to be out after ten o’clock.

It was a delightful feeling.

The day was pretty far spent when the formalities were concluded, and there was no hope of getting to my home that evening, so I took a bus to Winchester and booked a room at a hotel there for the night, and then strolled round the ancient city, which was England’s capital “when London was only a town”. After all those years of Alexandria and Cairo and Jerusalem and Beyrout and Aleppo it was a joy to see the familiar names over the English shops, to hear English voices and even to feel the drizzling English rain against my face.

The sky cleared as dusk fell and I took a bus out into the country, and walked between the bare winter hedgerows of an English lane. The smell of it was sweet to my nostrils, clean and fresh, and in a cottage garden was a smouldering bonfire of dead leaves, whose incense brought back memories of camp fires in summer meadows. Winter would soon be past, and my heart was jubilant at the thought that next Spring I could walk in these lanes again and look for the first primrose and violet and bluebell and ladysmock, and listen for the first cuckoo.

It was quite dark when I came to a tiny village, and from the square towered Norman church came the sound of organ music. The organist was practising, and I pushed open the battered oak door and sat down in a back pew of the dim lit church.

I am a great believer, as I have told you before, in corporate worship, and it is good that two or three, or two or three hundred, should be gathered together to praise the Lord, but I sometimes think that a man's soul gets nearest to God when he worships alone, and though I am myself a Free Churchman who normally worships with others in chapels of red brick, it is in the ancient village churches of the land that I best love to worship alone. There is mighty comfort in the thought that for a thousand years men and women have come to pray for strength beneath that same roof.

Past, present, and future seemed to mingle in the shadows of the tall pillars, and on that evening I thought of my country's long and noble history. Of battles like Crécy and Agincourt and Blenheim and Trafalgar and Waterloo and Verdun and Dunkirk and El Alamein.

I thought, too, of her civil struggles, of old tyrannies overthrown, and a gradual victory through the long centuries over privilege and poverty and man's inhumanity to man; of Hampden who challenged a King, of Wilberforce who freed the black slaves and of Shaftesbury who freed the white ones. Of Florence Nightingale and Dr. Barnardo and our own Chief, of a thousand heroes, known and unknown, who gave their strength and their lives to make England and the world a better place to live I thought of the War newly won. My own part in it had been such a back stage affair that I was free to admire its heroes, the men of the Battle of Britain, the men of Anzio and Alamein and Arnhem, and the men who went down to the sea in ships.

I knew how tired the nation was, and foresaw heavy going for the next few years. I remembered how low national morale had been after the 1914 War, when England was like a weary giant, groping in the dark.

And in that little village church I prayed that I at least might play a worthy part in the years to be.

The road back to sanity for England has been even longer and harder than I expected. You were only a small boy when the War ended, so you won't realise quite how bad things were in those first few years after VE and VJ days. We seemed to have lost the habit of working hard, the "black market" was an open scandal, and crime increased by leaps and bounds. Shopkeepers were rude to their customers, and the customers were about as bad. Internationally our prestige sank to a new low level. It was not the fault of any particular political party, or of any particular section of the community. I think we were just all very tired after our six years of total War.

Just a few of our leaders in various walks of life kept their heads. Sir Winston Churchill was one, and Mr. Attlee another. With very different political points of view they still tried to abide by the old standards, and kept their faith in Britain and her people, and this same spirit was shown by enough of the 'ordinary folk' to gradually bring things round.

I always think Len Hutton typified the spirit of those who fought back to win the Peace. You will remember that in 1938 he made the biggest Test score in history, 354 against Australia at the Oval. He was young and right at the top of his own particular tree. Then came the War, and on service he was involved in an accident to his right arm. It seemed that he would never bat again, for an operation resulted in his right arm becoming shorter than his left, thus completely destroying the balance of his stance.

Only Hutton himself can know the patient effort and courage that was needed to regain his old mastery, but he did it, and became a greater batsman than ever and the first professional captain of England.

A nation cannot fight two great Wars and come out unscarred, and if you look round at your country and the world, and think that we older people have made rather a mess of things, don't judge us too harshly. After all, we passed on to the rising generation two great things that we did not have ourselves. First there is the United Nations Organisation, which, though still far from perfect, is the nearest this troubled world has yet come to an International Organisation for

practical peace. Secondly, in this country, we have after many centuries of struggle evolved a social system which gives every child a fair chance of living a happy and useful life. These things, again, have not been achieved by any particular political party, but by the steady efforts of Christian men and women of varying political faiths throughout the long years.

When I was your age I was fond of a poem by Sir Henry Newbolt, about a sermon he had heard in Clifton chapel.

“O Youth,” the preacher was crying, “deem not thou
Thy life is thine alone;
Thou bearest the will of the ages, seeing how
They built thee bone by bone,
And within thy blood the Great Age sleeps sepulchred
Till thou and thine shall roll away the stone.”

Your generation has the best chance that any generation ever had to build the Great Age. So enjoy your merry party when you start life again as a free citizen, but then, at this great turning point in your life, find a moment to go alone into some building that contains a Cross, and go down on your knees and pray that whatever life may do to you, God will give you strength all your days to be the best Scout that it is in you to be.

Yours ever,

A.D.C.



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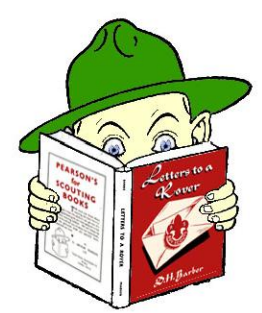
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