

THE EARLY DAYS OF HONG KONG SCOUTING—PART 10

ARCHIVES OF THE PAST – Part 5B

The letter from Rev. G. T. Waldegrave, Commissioner for the Colony of Hong Kong dated 31st May 1926 to the Imperial Headquarters in London continues to give a vivid account of scouting in Hong Kong in those early years.

(continued from the last issue of “Hong Kong Scouting #240”)

“We had quite a successful little rally on the 12th of this month. Every troop was to do something. It was to start with an inspection by the Governor, followed by 3/4 hours display of various sorts, and concluding with presentation of various awards. We were to use a parade ground about the size of a football ground, but it came on to pelt at 2 p.m. (show at 5.30!) and I had to shift the venue to the Volunteer H.Q. where we could have had one or two small displays such as jujitsu, eightsome reels, etc and the speeches under cover, while if it cleared up there was enough outdoor space to allow most of the other stunts to come off. Postponement was out of the question, but it cleared up just before 5., so we had it all out of doors on space just big enough for two tennis courts. Considering the quick alteration of plans and the cramped space the lads did finely, and the Governor told his A.D.C. afterwards that it beat any scout shows he had seen in Ceylon. He made a fine little speech appealing for more scouters, just what was wanted. We had a very good turn out just 400 of all ranks. Our Cubs have decreased (sic) owing to “going up” and lack of supply enough to keep packs up to strength, but I think that Sept. will see us well up on last years census for all branches, though not by 100.

A very keen Chinese Scoutmaster, whom I have quite a job to keep from going too fast, wrote to me the other day asking for permission to take in another 40 scouts plus one A.S.M., thus bringing his troop up to 70 with only three scouters. I naturally answered at once advising him to pick leaders from the 40 and train them first, but an answer to that was that he had already taken them in!

Butcher, of the Garrison Troop, has at last left for home. He had a sort of farewell do in his troop which was duly reported in the papers or rather one of them. To my surprise the speaker of the evening was our friend Beldon! However a very fine Serg. Major Instructor has now taken on the troop and the C.M. has asked for an A.S.M.'s warrant as has also one of Butcher's old boys who is incidentally a friend of Beldon's. Hollingdale the new S.M. knows all about the case, and quite agrees that I should get a definite assurance from these two A.S.Ms that they will not bring B. anywhere near the place or the boys on penalty of losing their warrants. No warrants without the assurance. Hollingdale tells me he is astounded at the total lack of Scout spirit in the troop, a fact of which I was too painfully aware. Butcher I saw on the troopship before she sailed, and he confessed then that he had learnt a lot and that coming abroad had done him a lot of good. I am enclosing a more formal introduction at Butcher's request in case he manages to call at I.H.Q., but personally I should strongly advise that at most he should be given only a minor job in a troop, certainly not S.M. He would make a good quartermaster, provided the kids have no brass gear to

polish, which was I think the main occupation of his troop here. He is at bottom a good fellow, but does not realise his own limitations, in any I agree, and possibly would if wrongly handled develop into a Bolshie of sorts. He is one big paradox right through. One little straw to show the way the wind blows I may quote. I never, nor did any one else except perhaps his scouts when they were learning it, saw him give the Scout salute, to me or anyone else even when returning it. It was always the military variety, so done as like obviously intentional.

My own little lot of Sea Scouts are I am glad to say going strong, largely owing to most valuable help given by a Lieut. Commander C.R.H. Harvey, O.B.E., R.N. of the R.N. Dockyard here. He is, worse luck shortly leaving, but he roped in several other officers and P.Os from the “Tamar”, depot ship, and as the Commodore is our troop President, the kids have had the use of their boats besides their own, as well as first rate practical training. Harvey helped a lot with a Dover troop (2nd .D. Sea Scout I think) before he came out here, so had some experience. I was able therefore to allow the troop to expand, and we now have two Scout Patrols and one Rover Patrol in the Troop, 20 all told, with one or two more coming on. However the most important thing is this. Once we got a full patrol in the troop some years ago, I laid it down that I could have no time for “bad hats”, especially as they are H.Q. Patrols and are responsible for looking after Association Camping gear. Accordingly every recruit, in addition age and swimming qualifications, has to be formally proposed seconded and elected. Up till six months or less ago we had only Chinese, and to my surprise some good class British parents of two delightful boys wished them to join the troop. I made no exception as regards election, of course, and though of course they were elected I watched with fear and trembling to see how they would mix. The first evening was rather a strain, as both “sides” were taking stock. Then the younger Britisher took a looking to the smallest Chinese who is a most cheering little soul. The liking was reciprocated and they are now as thick as anything. Then the older lad found his feet, brought along another British kid, also of a good class, Public School and Varsity father, and finally two other kids from the same school, the Central British School, joined. I hear now that another is likely to come along. When we got enough in for two patrols, we set about arranging the job. One Chinese tentatively suggested a Chinese and a British patrol. I let it stand for a minute or two and went on with another point, but brought up the suggestion later. I was delighted when both Chinese and British howled it down, and insisted on both patrols being “mixed”!

To be continued