

NOTES ON A MEETING HELD ON SATURDAY AUGUST 25th. 1923.
AT TRANSVAAL BOY SCOUTS' ASSOCIATION H.Q. OFFICES.

Present: Sir Alfred Pickford, Commissioner for Oversea Scouts, Messrs. Frank Raleigh, F.H. Hodgkinson, J.H.T. Weber, L.M. Briggs, A.W. Marris, representing the Scouts' Association, and the Revs. W.A. Palmer, W.E. Wilkinson, S.P. Woodfield, Higgs, Father Osmond Victor, Mr. Ashton Keyes, representing the Native and Coloured Communities and the "Pathfinders".

The Meeting was called at the instance of the "Pathfinders" to consider the relationship of that Organisation to the Imperial Scout Headquarters, London.

The Rev. Palmer pointed out that Scouting had been extended to natives and coloured peoples after considerable discussion and by a mutual compromise under which, in order to avoid any possibility of detrimentally affecting the movement among the European boys, the "Pathfinders" took that name instead of "Scout", accepted a different uniform, different badges, and in general avoided anything that might create misunderstanding. It was understood that Imperial H.Q. had accepted this arrangement and confirmed it. Great surprise was therefore felt at a notice in the "Scouter" of March 1923., which showed that the London Executive did not consider that the "Pathfinder" organisation came in anyway under its jurisdiction. Hence it appeared that the "Pathfinders" were to be penalised because in the interests of the European population they had agreed to a compromise instead of demanding the right, under the Scout Law and London Regulations, to the name and uniform, and all the public benefits accruing therefrom.

The "Pathfinders" and those associated with work amongst the native and coloured peoples, regarded it as of vital importance that they be definitely recognised by, and under the final control of, Imperial Headquarters.

Sir Alfred Pickford trusted that the deputation would realise that he was in an extremely difficult position. When he left England in November 1922., the Executive Council had definitely approved and accepted the constitution of the Pathfinders. He could not say how or why the matter had been revived in March this year, and the Executive had apparently revoked their former acceptance. He understood that nothing had gone from the Transvaal Headquarters which could have re-opened the question, and he presumed that it had not been raised by the Pathfinder organisation. He could only assume that on investigation some clause had been found in the Royal Charter which had necessitated this change of attitude, but he would think that the Pathfinders would rank as other affiliated bodies such as the Y.M.C.A.

He desired to make quite clear that this Executive decision could not alter the attitude of H.Q. on the broad principle that Scouting should be available for every boy in the world, regardless of colour, race, religion. "Every boy a Scout" was an unalterable position, but in point of fact Imperial H.Q. does not control oversea branches except on broad lines, and provided organisations kept within the boundaries of the general policy

and rules, London does not interfere. For instance, if a proposal were made to cut out the Promise to "Do my duty to God", London would at once interfere, for that would be cutting at a root principal of the Movement.

In South Africa he realised there were great difficulties in applying the principal he had referred to of "Every boy a Scout", and he felt that in arriving at a modus vivendi there had been much give and take, much compromise on both sides. It was feasible for the section most directly interested in the native and coloured work to take the high line: it was feasible for the Government, for the Governor-General, who was also Chief Scout, to take the high line of directly forbidding any formation of Scouts or similar organisations, and therefore both sides had been faced with the practical question, which was the better of two alternatives? and with the spirit that is characteristic of the Movement, a satisfactory way out had been found. There could be no doubt that ultimately native and coloured Scout Troops would come, because they existed elsewhere, but it would take time. Ultimately the Spirit of Scouting would break down caste prejudice. It was doing it in India where for six years he had fought for the Indian boy. Now the position there was fairly satisfactory.

As to the present position, he would like to know, did non-recognition by London really injure the Pathfinders, except perhaps in sentiment?

Rev. Woodfield explained that in the native mind this non-recognition did constitute a real injury. One of the great movements of recent years was the awakening of national conscience. In the Scout movement the native - parents rather than children - saw one world-wide brotherhood under which they received a recognition that put them nationally on a footing with other races. London's decision of March last destroyed this at a blow, said in effect "You are not recognised: you are not acceptable to the brotherhood": it dealt a blow at racial and national pride, and left them merely at the mercy of a Transvaal, local, Council. They had no complaint of their treatment by the Transvaal Council, on the contrary they greatly appreciated the sympathetic consideration accorded them and the assistance rendered, but at some future time, as the personnel of the Council changed, it was conceivable that an unsympathetic party might dominate the Council. The fact that the native was one of a world-wide organisation was a powerful factor to the adoption of a code that was for their spiritual, mental, and physical well-being.

Rev. Palmer confirmed the tremendous change in the mental outlook of the native; a change that astounded those who had worked among them twenty years ago. He pointed out the danger of independent associations not controlled by the Scout organisation, and the real danger, one might say menace, therein to the work among European boys.

Rev. Higgs enquired as to the position in Egypt and the Soudan,

Sir Alfred Pickford admitted that so far as the Soudan was concerned the position was at present hopeless and nothing was being done. He then explained the wonderful process of assimilation going on in India, instancing cases of high-caste Indians actually rendering practical active help to the lowest caste of coolies. They had cases of real gallantry performed by one, for the other, a thing regarded as an absolute impossibility a few years ago. He instanced cases of intermingling and association at Rajput monthly rallies. Scouting was even effecting Child-marriage.

He was entirely sympathetic, if desired he would cable London to ask why this action had been taken, but he thought it might be more satisfactory if they would leave the matter in his hands for action on his return to London.

General conversation on numerous aspects of the native and coloured question took place and then

Rev. Higgs expressed himself as confident that sooner or later the South African prejudice would die and the Scout work among their people receive recognition; he was content to work and wait.

Rev. Woodfield voiced the thanks of the deputation for Sir Alfred's sympathetic attitude; they quite realised his difficulties, and moved that the matter be left in his hands.

Unanimously agreed to.

JOHANNESBURG.
4/9/23.

A.W. MARRIS.

Secretary.
Transvaal Scout Council.

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