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SELF-RELIANCE AND THE GOAL OF EXCELLENCE

IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE HERE TODAY AND TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS VERY SPECIAL PROGRAM. THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA CONSTITUTE A TRIBUTE TO AMERICAN IDEALS OF HONESTY, INTEGRITY, AND PATRIOTISM. THE HONOR YOU RECEIVE TODAY HAS BEEN EARNED IN THE AMERICAN TRADITION. IT WAS NOT YOUR BIRTHRIGHT. WHAT IS YOUR BIRTHRIGHT IS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEEK EXCELLENCE, TO MAKE THE BEST OF YOURSELF, TO MAKE YOUR COUNTRY PROUD OF YOU. YOU HAVE DONE THESE THINGS.

YOU HAVE NOT BEEN CONTENT TO ACCEPT THE IDEALS AND CHALLENGES OF THE BOY SCOUTS HALF-HEARTEDLY. RATHER, YOU HAVE PUT YOURSELF INTO THE CHALLENGES. YOU HAVE SET FOR YOURSELF A GOAL OF EXCELLENCE, AND IT IS BECAUSE OF THAT GOAL AND BECAUSE OF THE PROGRESS YOU HAVE MADE IN THE ATTEMPT TO ACHIEVE IT, THAT YOU ARE HERE TODAY. YOURS IS THE SPIRIT OF SELF-RELIANCE, AND THE SPIRIT OF SELF-RELIANCE IS TRULY AN AMERICAN CHARACTERISTIC. IT IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC IN MODERN AMERICA.

AS THE UNITED STATES HAS PROGRESSED TECHNOLOGICALLY AND MATERIALLY AND AS OUR POPULATION HAS INCREASED ALARMINGLY, THE EFFECTS OF TOGETHERNESS AND CONFORMITY HAVE COME ABOUT AS A RESULT OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS, MOBILITY, AND ADVERTISING. TELEVISION, ALSO, HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMAGE-BUILDING WHICH HAS LED TO CONFORMITY. UNFORTUNATELY, IT IS OFTEN THE CASE THAT YOUNGSTERS WILL COME TO ACCEPT THE RULES OF AN ADMIRER GROUP IN ORDER TO BE ACCEPTED BY THAT GROUP RATHER THAN GUIDING THEIR ACTIONS ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN IDEALS, THEY BLINDLY DO AS THE GROUP WOULD DO. THIS, THEN, IS THE OPPOSITE OF SELF-RELIANCE.

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON WROTE IN AN ARTICLE ON "SELF-RELIANCE," "THERE IS A TIME IN EVERY MAN'S EDUCATION WHEN HE ARRIVES AT THE CONVICTION THAT ENVY IS IGNORANCE: THAT IMITATION IS SUICIDE: THAT HE MUST TAKE HIMSELF FOR BETTER OR WORSE AS HIS PORTION; THAT THOUGH THE WIDE UNIVERSE IS FULL OF GOOD, NO KERNEL OF NOURISHING CORN CAN COME TO HIM BUT THROUGH HIS TOIL BESTOWED ON THAT PLOT OF GROUND WHICH IS GIVEN TO HIM TO TOIL." IT IS UP TO YOU TO MAKE WHAT YOU WILL OF YOURSELF. AMERICAN HISTORY PROVIDES YOU WITH MANY HEROES TO LOOK UP TO, AND MANY EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW. YOUR EDUCATION OFFERS YOU THE OPPORTUNITY OF DISCIPLINED LEARNING. YOUR RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND TEACHES YOU TO STRIVE FOR THE HIGHEST, THE HOLY. YOUR SCOUTING EXPERIENCES OFFER YOU IDEALS FOR RIGHT LIVING. BUT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT, WHAT BECOMES OF YOU DEPENDS ON YOU. IT IS WHAT YOU PUT INTO LIVING THAT COUNTS.

EMERSON SAID THAT WHAT CONCERNED HIM WAS WHAT HE, HIMSELF, DID RATHER THAN WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THOUGHT ABOUT IT. HE SUGGESTED THAT HIS RULE MIGHT SERVE FOR THE WHOLE DISTINCTION BETWEEN GREATNESS AND MEDIOCRITY. "IT IS THE HARDER," HE SAID, "BECAUSE YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND THOSE WHO THINK THEY KNOW WHAT IS YOUR DUTY BETTER THAN YOU KNOW IT."--I CAN ATTEST TO THIS--"IT IS EASY IN THE WORLD TO LIVE AFTER THE WORLD'S OPINION: IT IS EASY IN SOLITUDE TO LIVE AFTER OUR OWN: BUT THE GREAT MAN IS HE WHO, IN THE MIDST OF THE CROWD KEEPS WITH PERFECT SWEETNESS THE INDEPENDENCE OF SOLITUDE."

NOW EMERSON DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE SHOULD BE BULLHEADED AND UNCHANGEABLE. A GREAT MAN HAS A CAPACITY FOR OPEN-MINDEDNESS. HE LISTENS TO THOSE AROUND HIM. HE WATCHES LIFE AS IT IS PLAYED OUT. BUT HE IS NOT SWAYED BLINDLY BY OTHER PEOPLE'S OPINIONS. HE IS NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK HIS OWN OPINIONS. HE DOES NOT STIFLE WHAT HE BELIEVES TO BE THE TRUTH ONLY TO BE POPULAR.

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THERE IS GREAT NEED TODAY FOR GREAT MEN, FOR LEADERS. WORLD PROBLEMS ARE VERY SERIOUS. IT SEEMS ALMOST AS THOUGH PROGRESS HAS RUN AWAY WITH US. MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE HAVING THE CHANCE TO LIVE AS OUR BIRTHRATE CLIMBS AND OUR DEATHRATE DROPS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PHENOMENAL POPULATION GROWTH IS POSING PROBLEMS THAT WE HAVE NOT HAD TO CONTEND WITH BEFORE. IN THE YEAR 2000, WHEN YOU BOYS ARE IN YOUR FIFTIES, IT IS PREDICTED THAT THE GROWTH IN POPULATION, FROM NOW UNTIL THEN, WILL BE EQUAL TO THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD AT THIS TIME, OR ABOUT 7 BILLION. THIS ONE CHANGE WILL CAUSE INNUMERABLE PROBLEMS LIKE THE DRAIN ON NATURAL RESOURCES, WORLD HUNGER, POVERTY, URBANIZATION, AND OVERCROWDED SCHOOLS. ANOTHER RESULT OF PROGRESS IS THE CREATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THIS INVENTION MEANS THAT WE MUST HAVE GOOD, STRONG, WISE MEN AT THE HELM OF THIS SHIP OF STATE.

WITH STUDIES SHOWING, ALL THE TIME, HOW THE PUBLIC IS SWAYED BY ADVERTISING, NEWSCASTING, AND SLANTED WRITING, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW WILL HAVE TO BE SELF-RELIANT MEN.

YOU MUST TAKE YOURSELVES SERIOUSLY. YOU MUST REALIZE THAT YOU YOURSELF MODEL YOUR FUTURE, AND THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF AMERICA HAVE EVERY CHANCE TO TURN OUT TO BE THE KIND OF MEN TO MAKE THEIR COUNTRY PROUD. AMERICA IS THE RICHEST, STRONGEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD. YOU ARE OFFERED EDUCATION. YOU ARE ENCOURAGED. YOU ARE FREE. YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP UNDER THE FINEST IDEALS A MAN CAN HAVE.

IF YOU ACCEPT EACH NEW EXPERIENCE AS A LESSON, IF YOU KEEP YOUR SELF INTACT AND DO NOT LET YOUR SELF DRIFT ALONG WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S OPINIONS, IF YOU CONTINUE TO STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE AS YOU HAVE AS A SCOUT, THEN LIFE, FOR YOU, WILL BE A COURT OF HONOR, AND YOU WILL BE AN EXAMPLE TO ALL WHO KNOW YOU.