

MEMORIES OF THE BOYS' BRIGADE.

(By an Old Boy.)

Perhaps the present-day youth, with his organised sport and various associations dedicated to his education and amusement, rather pities the boy of the past, and to some extent he may be justified, but there is one generation of Portland's youth which is quite satisfied that that pity is entirely misplaced as far as it is concerned. This at least was the unanimous opinion of a number of former members of the old Boys' Brigade when they met recently to discuss matters of mutual interest. Outside of members themselves no doubt the memory of the old Brigade is now rather hazy, even among Portland natives, but why should such history die? This short account I am sure will be of interest to residents of Portland—and to old boys in distant parts who are fortunate enough to receive from home a copy of your paper. It will be as the scent of heather to a wandering Scot.

In 1902 the Rev. Thomas Shanks, with Messrs. E. H. Alston and J. R. Burnett as assistants, established a company of the Boys' Brigade, the idea being to band together the boys connected with the local Presbyterian Church. The objects of the Brigade were to provide physical training and amusement in a strong moral and spiritual atmosphere. To put it briefly, the two words "Reverence" and "Discipline" tell exactly what the boys were taught. But the movement was too grand and too big to be confined by denominationalism; soon every Protestant church was strongly represented and the monthly church parade to Scots Church gave place to a parade to each church in turn. Over sixty boys were enrolled within a few months. Meetings were held every week, first in the Presbyterian Hall in Palmer Street, and next in the Sunday School in Tyers Street. This building, however, proved too small, and before long a move was made to the old bond store next to the "Observer" office in Julia Street. This provided a fairly suitable meeting place, until, in time, the use of the Orderly Room was procured, and at last we had a hall roomy enough for our needs, and the way was clear for genuine hard work. At the sound of the whistle a long line of lusty youths stretched down the length of the

the whistle a long line of lusty youths stretched down the length of the room, and smartly uniformed petty officers dressed the line. By the way, a naval uniform had been adopted ere this, each boy supplying his own.

The first exercise after roll call was the repeating of the Lord's Prayer, in which every boy was under obligation to join; a short address followed, and then Captain Burnett took charge of the working programme. What was not taught under his direction? Dumbbells, bar-bells, rifle exercises, cutlass and bayonet drill, physical jerks, vaulting horse, trapeze, rings, ladder climbing, fencing, etc., etc. Who can forget the good times these things provided, to say nothing of training for concerts (for which Miss Vera McEachern gave willing service) football, cricket, camps—at Bridgewater Lakes, Narrawong, Cape Bridgewater, Swan Island, and last, but not least, the ever memorable trip to Melbourne during the visit of the American Fleet in 1907.

I must not fail to tell also of the band. Our own drum and fife band of twenty strong provided the martial touch when we stepped it out on our church parades, and surely some old Portlanders can still hear the strains of "Adeste Fideles" or "Onward Christian Soldiers" as they were "broadcast" some Sunday morning twenty years ago.

I well remember the Brigade forming the Guard of Honor during a visit of Lord Northcote to the town. Some time later, during the Swan Island encampment before referred to, when His Excellency was reviewing all units of the camp, he requested to be informed when he came to the Portland boys, and told them how pleased he had been with their appearance. Our boys were also highly commended by the Camp Commandant for their appearance on parade and for their general behaviour.

But now the question you are all asking is: "What gave the death blow to such a vigorous and praiseworthy movement?" Well, like the Irishman who ever blamed the Government, we can say it was the defence policy of the Government of the day that killed us. The authorities decided that the Portland boys would make fine Naval Cadets. A naval officer was stationed in the town, and great things were promised. We were not turned out of our home, we were not even ordered to disband, but we were regarded as a rival, and in the subsequent tug-of-war the Government forces won.

a rival, and in the subsequent tug-of-war the Government forces won. Slowly, but surely, our members were enticed to the new allegiance, until we were but the shadow of our former selves, and an honorable laying-down of arms was all that faced us. This was some eighteen or nineteen years ago, and the former boys grew into men. Men they proved themselves to be when the bugle sounded in 1914 and the following years, and to-day many bear the cruel marks of war, while others again sleep the long sleep on some far foreign or Allied shore.

Are they forgotten? Nay! As long as memory lasts will their comrades in the old Boys' Brigade keep their memory green. It was such members which prompted a number of the boys to meet in the town during the past week and take the necessary steps to turn to some profitable use a sum of money standing to the credit of the Brigade during these years, and which accumulated interest has now brought to over £10. It was the unanimous desire that this amount should be used to perpetuate the memory of fallen comrades, and

with this in view, the amount was formally handed over to the treasurer of the Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Fund.

Thus the Brigade is now truly defunct, but the memories of former days are too good to be allowed to die, and on some occasion, such as "Back-to-Portland" celebrations, a grand re-union of old boys should surely find a place.