

An Appeal for HMS Implacable

By Wheatley Cobb in 1922



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**"BOYS & THE SEA.
HOLIDAY TRAINING.
A TRAFALGAR SHIP IN FALMOUTH HARBOUR.**

**(By G. WHEATLEY COBB,
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In Falmouth Harbour is a famous ship captured from the French which did 40 years' service in the old British Navy, and which has been saved from the ship-breaker by Mr. G. Wheatley Cobb. It is now designed as a training-ship for Sea Scouts, and in this article Mr. Wheatley Cobb makes an important appeal.

Great Britain is an island, and not a very large one. No part of it is more than fifty miles from the sea. The British Empire was made on the sea, and lives by the sea. On our coinage Britannia, trident in hand, sits throned by the sea. The Union Jack is a sea flag, designed to be flown "at the Maine top" by "all our subjects travelling the seas," and the red and white crosses of faith and of sacrifice which form the glorious device, lie on a field the colour of the ocean. No symbolism could be more appropriate for a nation that twice over in 120 years has saved its own freedom and that of the world by its sea power. We are a seafaring race, and the hearts of our adventurous boys turn more often to the sea than to any other career.

THE SEA SCOUTS

Hence, when Sir Robert Baden-Powell was inspired by a kind Providence to found the great Boy Scout organization, he soon found that it was necessary, in the case of British boys, at least, that there should be a side of the movement concerned mainly with the sea. Thus the Sea Scouts came into being. How popular this branch became, and how well the boys learned and practised their duties, is shown by the fact that 28,000 of them took over the task of coast watching throughout the war, and so set free the coastguards for other work.

The Chief Scout has lately told us that a great part of a Sea Scout's special knowledge can be acquired inland, and it is probable that only a small proportion of them have had much experience afloat. But these opportunities are merely a beginning. Anyone who has had the charge of boys in a stationary ship in a great harbour will have longed to give at least a brief taste of similar advantages to the great army of boys who live away from such places and yet who love the sea and ships. Probably few of the boys who join the Sea Scouts do so with the intention of making the sea their profession. They are of the breed that produces yachtsmen, men whom Fate or Duty has compelled to spend their lives in trades or professions ashore, but who love the sea, and spend their holidays upon it, and who so often become expert amateur seamen. From this class was drawn the R.N.V.R.,

that did much splendid work in the war in the crews of mine-sweepers, coastal motor boats, and other small craft.

THE RIGHT SEA TRAINING

The Sea Scout training, as I understand it, is the first step in making such men as these. "Well-to-do boys," says a pamphlet issued from the Association Headquarters, "have opportunities for yachting and boating, and our object is to give also to the poorer boy his chance of becoming an amateur sailor, with all its joys and all its benefits." That is, we must supply the means for boys in large numbers to spend their holidays in similarly strenuous work and play which shall not only harden their muscles and quicken brain and hand, but shall do so under conditions and in surroundings calculated to fire their imaginations and inspire them with those ideals of duty and service which are the foundations of the character we wish to develop. Such a holiday, if the full fruits are to be reaped, should be spent not merely by the sea, with more or less frequent opportunities for rowing, sailing, and swimming, but in a ship moored in some harbour where boating should be not merely an exercise or a diversion, but part of the necessary daily routine.

It has been my good fortune to be engaged for many years past in providing the means for putting these ideas into practice. I am the only Englishman who has thought it worthwhile to endeavour to preserve historic ships. Much as has been written of the beauty, the skilful construction and the wonderful achievements of the ships of the line and frigates which formed the fleets of Nelson, their destruction has been viewed with absolute indifference. No one has cared for the glorious vessels which in the immortal words of Mahon, stood between Napoleon and the dominion of the world. These ships are not only monuments of heroism, historic documents of inestimable value; they alone of inanimate things are personalities.

A FAMOUS TRAFALGAR SHIP.

An old line-of-battle ship moored in some great harbour would be an ideal place for sea scouts to come for their summer training. Such a ship is admirably adapted by its structure for such a use. The clear and spacious decks, with their rows of large square gun-ports, afford ample light and air, while the thick wooden sides maintain an equable temperature. No other type of ship can offer these advantages.

And such a ship is waiting to be used. In Falmouth Harbour she lies at anchor, second only to the Victory in age and fame. The 74 gun ship Implacable was built for the French Royal Navy before the Revolution and launched as the Duguay-Trouin, it is believed in 1789. In 1793 she was at Toulon, when the British Mediterranean Fleet, under Lord Hood, took possession of the town and dockyard. When, a few months later, the place was evacuated, the Duguay-Trouin had to be left behind. Some years afterwards she was at sea, and on more than one occasion narrowly escaped capture by British ships. Finally she was in the van of the Allied Fleet at the battle of Trafalgar, and with three others under the command of Admiral Dumanoir escaped after exchanging shots with the Victory. A fortnight later the squadron fell in with a British force under Sir R. Strachan and after a gallant action in which the Duguay-Trouin lost 150 killed and wounded, all were captured and brought into Plymouth. As a British ship under her new name the Implacable saw 40 years of active service, and in her last commission she carried a golden cock at her main truck as the smartest ship in the Mediterranean Fleet. In 1855 she began a new career as

a training ship for boys at Devonport, a service in which she continued for half a century.



Punch Magazine brings the appeal for HMS Implacable to public notice

SAVED FROM THE SHIP-BREAKERS

At the end of 1904 she was paid off and ordered to be sold, and in September, 1908, was advertised for sale. I thereupon brought the facts to the notice of King Edward and by his Majesty's orders the ship was taken out of the sale list. Six months later she was found to be in need of extensive repairs for which the Admiralty had no funds, and was therefore again ordered to be sold. I thereupon appealed to the Admiralty to lend her to me for

preservation and determined to do what I could myself to maintain so priceless a national heirloom. My application was reinforced by a petition from the members of the Royal Academy and their guests at the banquet in May, 1909. After nearly four years' correspondence the ship was handed over to me, and in September, 1912, I moved her to Falmouth. In that glorious harbour I had for 9 years been keeping a 38 gun frigate, a beautiful specimen of a celebrated class which I had bought from a ship-breaker in 1897, after losing the old Foudroyant, and have since used as a home for a small number of boys. By August, 1914, I had done a considerable amount of repairs to the Implacable, aided largely by one generous friend to whom the nation is indebted for making possible the preservation of the ship. When war broke out, work had to be stopped as men were called up and material was unobtainable, and since then heavy taxation and the immensely increased cost of running my own ship (which has now reached £5,000 a year) have made it impossible to resume work. A few months ago the Admiralty called upon me either to carry out repairs or surrender the Implacable to destruction. An appeal for help in "The Times" brought no response, and it looked as if the doom of the famous ship was at last sealed. As often happens, however, when things looked darkest light dawned.

A TRAINING SHIP FOR LAND BOYS.

In 1909 Sir Robert Baden-Powell had written asking me if I could take 100 Boy Scouts for a short course of instruction. I had replied that my own ship was hardly large enough, but that I hoped eventually to be able to offer him the Implacable. I now wrote reminding him of this, and suggesting that the Association should take over the Implacable as their Sea Scouts headquarters and training centre, and support my appeal for funds. The Chief Scout at once saw the great advantages which the Implacable offered, and agreed readily to my proposal, and on Trafalgar Day "The Times" published another appeal from me asking for £10,000 to fit the ship for use by the Scouts. The Admiralty had offered to take the ship to Devonport, do the necessary repairs, and bring her back and moor her at Falmouth for the sum of £5,180, and the balance would be required for boats, hammocks, mess utensils and fittings.

The combined appeal of the ship and of the Boy Scouts has called forth a magnificently generous offer by some influential friends in London to find the whole of the £10,000 on condition that a fund of £20,000 is raised and invested so as to give a permanent income for the maintenance of the ship. I have offered £1,000 towards this fund, and the generous friend before alluded to has contributed another £1,000, both on condition that the remaining £18,000 is raised.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SUBSCRIBE

A further powerful spur to the movement for the preservation and utilization of the Implacable has been given by the appeal of the Prince of Wales on January 13. His Royal Highness asks for £200,000 to enable the Boys Scouts' Association to enlarge its activities. Of the ten special objects which the Fund is designed to serve, the 4th is "To provide and maintain training ships and instructors for Sea Scouts." The Implacable has been adopted as the first of these training ships, and subscriptions to the Prince's Fund may be earmarked for the Implacable, and will be acknowledged on behalf of his Royal Highness.

Should the appeal be successful and the sum of £20,000 be raised, the Implacable will

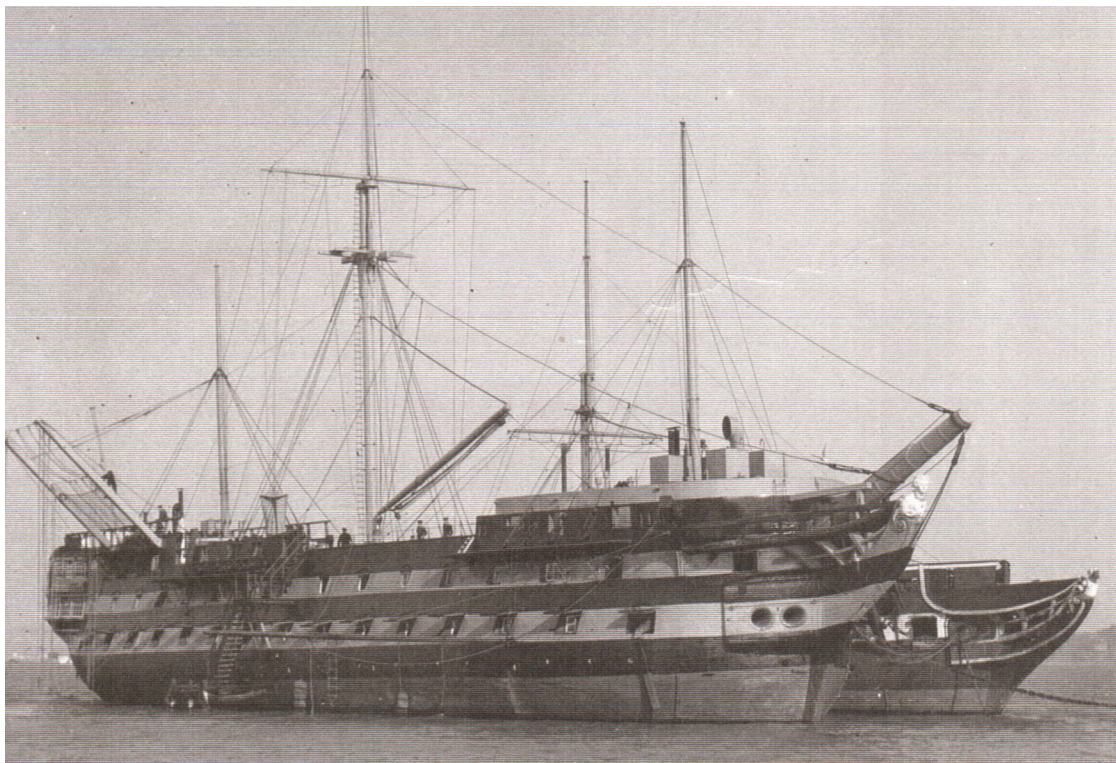
become a training centre for Sea Scouts all over the country, but especially for those of the West of England and South Wales. They will come down in parties, under their own scoutmasters, and will find on board all the equipment and appliances for combined instruction and recreation. They will live in an atmosphere of history and of romance which no other ship could supply.

The scheme is not an untried experiment. Acting on the Chief Scout's suggestion, I have for several years past had parties of boys, Scouts and others, aboard my own ship for a fortnight's instruction in the summer, and in every case the results have been entirely satisfactory, both to me and to the visitors. They have had the time of their lives, and I have seen them leave much better boys than they came.

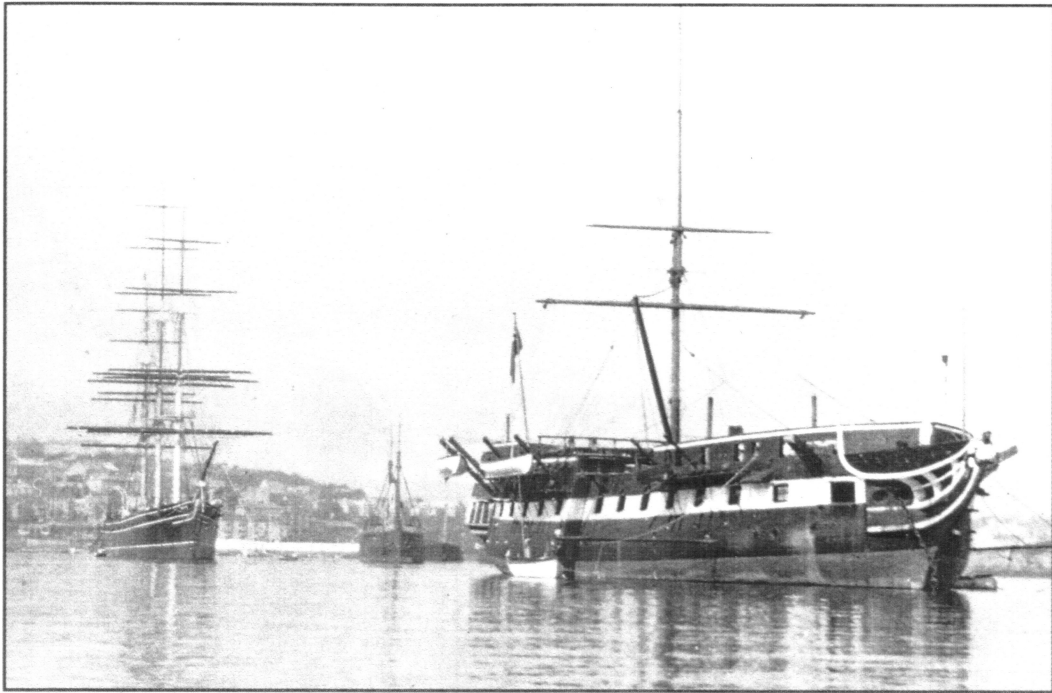
I have undertaken to do all the work in connection with the maintenance of the Implacable and her use by the Scouts. The proximity of my own ship will make this possible, and the experience of nearly 30 years will be useful.

There is no place in the kingdom so suited for this work as Falmouth Harbour. The wide expanse of sheltered water for rowing or sailing, the absence of tidal currents, the numerous creeks, where boats can lie concealed, combine to make it an ideal locality for instruction and play. It will be seen, therefore, that for the object to be attained the opportunity is a unique one. The combination of the historic ship, the situation, the generous provision of money, and of economical management is one never likely to occur again.

It is impossible to believe that an appeal for the preservation of this priceless historic monument, this epic in timber, having for its object the well-being of British boys, will fail, backed, as it is, by the best beloved of English Princes.



HMS Implacable in front of the Foudroyant - c1945



TS Foudroyant with the Cutty Sark at Falmouth – 1920s

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