



Dr J B Paton

Founder of The Boys' Life Brigade

David Aubrey QC

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John Brown Paton, the Founder of the Boys' Life Brigade, was born on the 17th December 1830 at Galston, Ayrshire. His father was Alexander Paton, and his mother was Mary Brown. Paton claimed descent from Covenanters, on his father's side from John Paton and on his mother's side from John Brown. He married Jessie Paton of Glasgow.

He felt called to become a minister in the Congregational church and attended college in Birmingham from 1847. He graduated as B.A. from London University in 1849, and as M.A. in 1854, in both classics and philosophy, winning prizes in Hebrew and New Testament.

When the Congregational Institute was established in Nottingham in 1861 to train candidates for the Congregational ministry, Paton was appointed as its first Principal, a position he held for 35 years. The Institute grew in reputation, and he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Glasgow University in 1882.

John Brown Paton was an admirer of William Smith and the work of The Boys' Brigade, but had reservations, shared by a number of nonconformist churches, about the perceived military aspects of the Brigade. Accordingly, he founded The Boys' Life Brigade, stating,

*"We don't intend our Brigade, in any sense, to be a rival to The Boys' Brigade. I would rather call it a complement to it - in this sense that, while The Boys' Brigade is hindered by the objection which many people take to its military organisation and associations, the new Brigade will meet those who desire to have boys secure the advantages of the discipline and so on of The Boys' Brigade free from the objections I have named. Personally, I do not object to the military forms of The Boys' Brigade but it is useless to ignore the fact that many people do".*

In place of drill as a means of providing discipline, the BLB used lifesaving and the teaching of swimming.

His faith and awareness of the needs of others led him to become involved in activities that were not simply denominational, and he was convinced of the need for co-operation between all creeds to bring the influence of religion to the improvement of society. He took an active part in plans to raise social conditions and instituted the 'Bible Reading and Prayer Union' and was vice president of the British Institute for Social Service. Apart from founding The Boys' Life Brigade and The Girls' Life Brigade, he also instituted the Young Men's and Young Women's Brigade of Service and the Boys' and Girls' League of Honour.

Paton contributed to a number of religious periodicals and wrote several books including collected essays. He died at Nottingham on the 26th January 1911, and was survived by three sons and two daughters.