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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Richard W. Kaeuper

In searching for a better understanding of chivalric identity, we might well begin in the year 1911. Though perhaps not a date that often attracts medievalists' close consideration, 1911 repays attention, for in that year the first *Handbook for Boys* was published by the Boy Scouts of America.¹ This original *Handbook* (a facsimile of which I obtained via the Internet) presented in Chapter VI a concise "History of Chivalry," sixteen pages packed with enthusiastic explanation and wonderful illustrations. That first edition (the title page appears as [Fig. 1](#), overleaf) numbered 300,000 copies; the print run climbed tenfold to three million in the second edition of 1914, so that the *Handbook* had circulated in a good many copies by 1925, when, sadly, the chapter on chivalry vanished. By then, I believe, it had done its work on an entire generation or more.

We may be interested in the 1911 *Handbook*, however, more as a reflection than as a cause. The underlying conception of chivalry it presented was not the *Handbook's* own creation, but rather a splendidly American twist on views solidly established in the Victorian world. A few illustrations and quotations from the text will make the point better than any summary. The account opens with a representation of an "Ancient Knight" ([Fig. 2](#)) and these words:

A little over fifteen hundred years ago the great order of knighthood and chivalry was founded. The reason for this was the feeling on the part of the best men of that day that it was the duty of the stronger to help the weak.

(237)

If the date raises eyebrows—chivalry beginning in the fifth century—even some modern accounts preserve the sentiment that chivalry was beneficent and protective. Yet, as the *Handbook* history qualifies the picture:

[End Page 1]



Figure 1

[Click for larger view](#)



Figure 2

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Of course in those days there also lived men who called themselves knights, but who had none of the desire for service that inspired Arthur and the others. . . . Chivalry then was a revolt against their brutal acts and ignorance, and a protest against the continuation of the idea that might was right. . . . Of course this struggle of right against wrong was not confined to the days in which chivalry was born.

(237) **[End Page 2]**

Here the point is driven home with a fine representation of a Pilgrim Father, and the text links this figure with chivalry ([Fig. 3](#)):



Figure 3

[Click for larger view](#)

When the Pilgrim Fathers founded the American colonies, the work of Arthur and Alfred and the other great men of ancient days was renewed and extended and fitted to the new conditions and times.

With the English settlements of Raleigh and Captain John Smith we might almost say that a new race of men was born and a new kind of knight was developed.

(238)

This new race of the chivalrous swiftly crosses the Appalachian Mountains in the figure of the pioneer (Fig. 4):



Figure 4

[Click for larger view](#)

[End Page 3]

No set of men . . . showed this spirit of chivalry more than our pioneers beyond the Alleghenies. In their work and service they paralleled very closely the knights of the Round Table, but where as Arthur's knights were dressed in suits of armor, the American pioneers were dressed in buckskin. They did, however, the very same things which ancient chivalry had done, clearing the forests of wild animals, suppressing the outlaws and bullies and thieves of their day, and enforcing a proper respect for women. Like the old knights they often were compelled to do their work amid scenes of great bloodshed, although they loved to live in peace.

(239)

The theme comes to its peak, of course, with the link to modern Boy Scouts, drawn as Modern Knights, successors to chivalry of old (Fig. 5):

Just as the life of the pioneers was different from that...

Chapter 1

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the Issue of Chivalric Identity***Richard W. Kacuper*
University of Rochester

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