

THE LIFE OF BADEN-POWELL

I - FAMILY INFLUENCES

B.P. or Ste as he was fondly called in his family was the 5th of seven children. He was born in February 22, 1857 to the Rev. Herbert George Baden-Powel, an Oxford professor, a lover of GOD, and a great naturalist, and to Henrietta Grace Smythe, daughter of Admiral W. T. Smythe of the British Navy and a descendant of the family of Capt. John Smythe, the pioneer who had exciting adventures with the red Indians of Virginia, USA.

It was a blessing to the Baden-Powel children that both their parent shared ideas of religion, education, and the bringing up of children which were very much advanced of their times. Both took interest in their children's' activities and while they expected obedience, thoroughness in work or play, and orderliness, they are always ready to join their fun and games.

Being an eager student of nature, their father often took the boys for long walks in the country. He would tell them delightful stories of the life of plants and animals. He would explain to them that there is much history hidden under the soil of the earth. On these expeditions, they found many strange flowers, plants, butterflies, and birds' eggs to add to their father's collection or their own.

It is very unfortunate that Rev. Baden-Powel died when B.P. was only three years old. His elder brothers and their mother had precious memories of him that she determined to follow her husband's intelligent and entertaining ways of bringing up their sons. So, she, as B.P. was fondly called in their home, was brought up by his very charming, artistic, and very competent mother.

Though she could not often spare the time to take them into the country, they did sometimes go for exciting trips to Epping Forest, Hadley Woods, and other places in the greenbelt of woods and fields surrounding London. And, almost daily, she took them for walks through the interesting streets of the city and the lovely London Parks. In their picnics in the woods and open country, she taught them to watch people, animals, birds, and other living creatures. She encouraged them to give her details of their appearance and then to use their reasoning powers and try to tell her something about their character and habits. B.P. said this was how he acquired the habit of noticing small signs and reading meaning from them.

The children found their mother a very good companion. Not only was she high spirited and full of fun but also clever at inventing amusing and instructive games and could weave stories out of the facts and fancies they brought her. Walks with her were like voyages of discovery; there where so many things to observe; the contents of the shop windows, the clothing, the manner of walking and so forth of the passers by. Afterwards, they describe to their mother what they had seen.

He went hiking, camping, and boating with his brothers. There were five of them and they built their own huts, caught their own rabbits and fishes, and cooked them. With them, he learned the value of team work, of obedience to a leader, and the experience of making his own mistakes and accepting the consequences.

II - SCHOOL DAYS INFLUENCES

For a short time B.P. went to a nearby school for little boys and girls. Then, when he was 11, B.P. went to Rosehill School at Tunbridge Wells. Although he was only there for two years, he impressed his headmaster who, when he was about to leave, praised his force of character and his good influence on his classmates. He had worked very hard during those years and gained two scholarships, one for a school in Scotland and the other for Charterhouse. It was considered for him better to attend Charterhouse as this was located in London.

B.P. was thirteen years of age when he joined the old and famous school. He was very fond of history, so he read all he could find about the school that he could tell many amusing tales about the old carthusians. Little did he know that he was to become, in later life, the most famous and beloved of them all.

When he was fifteen, the school was moved to Goddalming Surrey with its mysterious small woods called the 'copse'. About this time, B.P. has already made an impression on the school and this was shown in the remarks of his headmaster who said that during the difficult times of the turnover, "he showed unusual intelligence and a breath of feeling that was not often found in boys. He had helped to smooth out many awkward situations."

He was not outstanding either in work or play. His French master said that his work was fair but that his behavior was unsatisfactory and that he often sleeps during the lesson. The Science master said he paid no attention to his lessons. On several occasions, however, he showed that he was less inattentive than his masters will give him credit. His housemaster, for example, said that young B.P. had all the qualities of a leader. He also excelled in arts and in English. He was free from self-consciousness, was outspoken but always friendly with the Head and the masters. He supplied the school papers with interesting articles, which he also supplied with amusing illustrations.

During this time, Dr, Haig Brown, was the Headmaster of Charterhouse. B.P. always spoke in admiration of his skill in dealing with boys. He encouraged the development of creativity, innovation, and self-reliance among his students, which came of great help to B.P. during his military years.

All the time B.P. could spare from school activities he spent in the copse practicing woodcraft. There he learned to use the axe to clear the ground ready for the building of a comfortable shelter, to set traps for birds and rabbits, to provide food for him and to cook it over a small smokeless fire of twigs. Most of his time, however, was spent watching the habits of birds and other wild creatures in their homes. He learned to stay still and quiet that he made friends with many of them. It was more interesting to him to watch or draw them other than to kill them. He was completely happy in the copse. He said, "Without knowing it, I was gaining an education that was of infinite value to me later."

B. P. did not like being good at just one thing but enjoyed whatever the day brought forth: football, shooting, debating, boating, and most of all acting. He was a fine mimic, and had a delightful singing voice, and could draw and write equally well with both hands.

III - LIFE IN THE MILITARY

Unable to continue his education at Oxford, he took an examination for commission in the Army at the suggestion of his brother, Warrington. Though doubtful on account of his poor academic standing at Charterhouse, he nevertheless studied hard for it, especially geometry.

He acquitted himself extremely well in the examinations. Out of 700 candidates, he came out second in Cavalry and fourth in Infantry. Because of his high place in the examinations, he was exempted from attendance at the Military Training College at Sandhurst and was given a direct commission as a Sub-Lieutenant assigned with the 13th Hussars stationed in India. This was the regiment, which formed the right flank of the Cavalry line in the famous 'Charge of the Light Brigade' during the Crimean War.

As a young Subaltern in India, he was able to fully develop all those interests he had in Scouting work - reconnaissance and surveying - and he became known as one of the great army scouts. He began to teach the elements of these subjects to young soldiers. Later, he did Secret Service work in the Mediterranean and then saw service against Chief Dinuzulu of the Zulus and then against King Prempei of the Ashanti in South Africa. Then, it was followed by many interesting and exciting days in other parts of Africa, days which B.P. enjoyed more than any other.

The Siege of Mafeking

While much credit was given to B.P.'s leadership and ingenuity for the success of the campaigns against the Zulu and the Ashanti, it was by Mafeking that he became a household word. Why the successful defense of this town so thrilled the world could perhaps be attributed to three factors:

1. The world loves underdogs to succeed, a case of David beating Goliath. It was a case of 1, 251 ill equipped and ill supplied defenders as against a well equipped and well supplied attacking force of 9000 Boers (Dutch settlers in South Africa).
2. The British suffered many reverses in the early months of the war. Any leader who was not defeated by the Boers was bound to get into the limelight.
3. B.P. himself and his resourceful, not to say bold and daring, methods appealed to the British. He played on the fears of the Boers.

Despite the many successful sorties they did against the enemy in every opportunity, B.P. knew that his small garrison of 1,251 men would not be able to hold 9000 men. Cunning had to be employed to deceive them. Thus, B.P. issued the following instruction:

"Bluff the enemy with show of force as much as you like, but don't get yourself too far out of touch with your own side without orders, lest you draw them on into difficulties in their endeavor to support you.... do not always wait for orders if you see the situation demands action. Don't be afraid to act for fear of making a mistake. A man who never made a mistake, never made anything. If you find you have made a mistake, carry it through nevertheless with energy. Pluck and dash have often changed a mistake into success."

Siege Lifted

After 217 days, the siege was over and B.P. became a popular hero. He was promoted Major General at the age of 43.

IV - THE LAST YEARS OF B.P.

B.P. was promoted to Lt. General in June 10, 1907. He retired from the army to devote his time to the Boy Scouting Movement which he founded and which has grown tremendously way beyond his expectations. The acorn he planted has grown to become a great oak that covers the world. It was on account of this that in 1929, King George V conferred upon him a peerage. He was made a Baron of the British Empire and took for himself the title, Lord Robert S.S. Baden-Powell of Gilwell.

He got married in October of 1912 at the age of 55 to a young lady of 23 by the name of Olave Soames. They lived happily for 30 years. In her, B.P. got not only a loving wife but a wonderful partner in his work for the young people of the world. They had three children, a boy and two girls, Peter who was born in 1913, Heather who was born in 1915, and the youngest Betty who was born in 1917.

B.P. led a very active life; attending to both to the boys and the girls of the world even when he was already in his seventies. Always by his side was his ever loving wife. The Chief Scout and the Chief Guide of the World has always been a welcome sight to see.

When World War II broke out in 1939, B.P. was living in Kenya and was in his eighty-third year. It grieved him that he was too old to make any active contribution to the war effort.

Two years earlier, he and Lady Baden-Powell has stayed at the Outspan a hotel at Nyeri founded and run by Eric Walker who has been Secretary of the Scout Association in its early days. They had loved the quiet peace there, the warm climate that suited B.P.'s old bones, the magnificent view of Mount Kenya, the 'Treetops' (now so famous) from which B.P. could watch and paint the wild creatures he loved.

For a while, in the gentle climate of Kenya, his health improved and he spent his time writing and painting. Some of his best work is a series of water-colours of wild life painted in the last year of his life and published as Birds and Beasts in Africa and More Sketches of Kenya.

In September 1940, however, he had a relapse. The doctor warned his wife that his heart was 'awfully tired'. The life that had been so packed with action and ideas and ideals was slowly ebbing away. He had had the satisfaction of living to see his three children grown up and happily married; to watch the two great Movements that he had founded grow in strength and influence. He had found the woman of his dreams and had enjoyed her loving support for nearly thirty years. It was time to go.

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On Christmas Day, 1940, he sat out of bed to listen to the King's broadcast speech to the Empire; on January 6th, 1941, he was just conscious enough to nod in understanding when his wife gave him the news of an Italian defeat at Bardia; then he just slipped into a coma and on January 8, 1941, the great heart that had spread so much happiness throughout the world stopped beating. He was almost eighty-four.

They buried his body in a simple grave at Nyeri, within sight of Mount Kenya. His spirit lives on today, wherever there are Scouts.

HISTORY OF SCOUTING

The Genesis of an Idea

Scouting began as an idea coming out of B.P.'s experiences during his growing up years and in the military, in India and in Africa. These taught him that the best way to get people to do things is to make them want to do those things. Thus, a philosophy of training was evolved which he tried while assigned as the Commanding Officer of the 5th Dragon Guards in India. This philosophy states that:

1. Training should be fun.
2. Training should be carried out in small groups preferably in competition with each other.
3. Training should encourage self-discipline and self-reliance.

Using this philosophy and contrary to existing military conventions, he started to train the Dragons; those who successfully passed the training were given the title **SCOUT** and the right to wear a distinguished badge in the shape of a Fleur d'lis, then forerunner of the present Scout badge. The attempt came to be a great success. Thus, he went on to write his ideas in a book entitled *Aids to Scouting*, a soldiers guide in reconnaissance.

This same method and philosophy he also used in the training of the South African Constabulary which in many aspects could be considered as a dry run for Scouting. Even the slogan the SAC chose is "**Be Prepared.**"

When B. P. returned to London in 1903, he saw a transformed society. To his dismay, he saw the extent of the trade depression and unemployment that followed the Boer War, the general decline in standards and, in particular, the apathy of so many young people - "thousands of boys and young men, pale, narrow chested, hunched up, miserable specimens, smoking endless cigarettes, numbers of them betting."

It was not surprising then that he was greatly impressed when he attended the annual demonstration of the Boy's Brigade of Sir William Smith. Some 7,000 boys out of 54,000 members were present. B.P. congratulated Sir William for the turn out. He was, however, concerned that the program of the Brigade seemed largely to be a copy of the military drills in the army. He suggested that if the program were more varied, the Brigade will have four times more recruits. He told him of how the idea of Scouting became popular with the young men in the cavalry and that something of that kind might prove to be equally attractive to younger boys. It's aim could easily be diverted from war to peace since the inculcation of character, health and manliness, which is it's basis, are qualities much needed in a citizen as in a soldier.

Sir William agreed with his idea and suggested that B.P. should write a book for boys on the lines of *Aids to Scouting*.

Thus, B. P. began to jot down ideas. He wanted a book that will be interesting in its own right. He knew too well from his experiences in training soldiers, from spying and

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reconnaissance, from recollections of his own adventurous trips as a boy with his brothers, from memories of stalking around the copse at Charterhouse - that whatever programme he presented must be practical, must be adventurous, must be fun. B.P. took boys seriously; he never talked down to them. He knew, as in Mafeking, that if you set them a challenge, they would rise to meet it.

He wanted a scheme that would inculcate habits of self-reliance and concern for others. He wanted to effect this by developing powers of observation and reasoning, by teaching practical skills and encouraging physical fitness, by instilling the virtues of self-discipline and obedience. Above all, it must be based on things boys liked to do, things that would capture their imagination. But, how to do it?

The Acorn that Grew into a Mighty Tree and Covered the World

B.P. mulled over the problem for two years and not until April of 1906 did he manage to sketch out some programme suggestions which he sent to Sir William Smith. Though polite in his appraisal, he was not very enthusiastic about it. There was too much emphasis on doing activities in small groups or gangs rather than in company formation.

Being made aware that his book 'Aids to Scouting' was being used in some schools in the training of teachers as a method of training their pupils and wards, B. P. looked at it again and decided it could not really be revised to suit peacetime conditions and boys. It would be much better to write a new book altogether. So, with his usual thoroughness, he read and studied everything he could lay his hands on concerning the training of young men both past and present. All the while, he kept remembering his growing days and the Boys Brigade of Mafeking, the way in which they were organized and the surprising ease with which they had assumed responsibility. The result of this took the form of two four page pamphlets which he circulated to people whom he believed might be interested. One was entitled, **Boy Scouts, A Suggestion**; and the other, **Boy Scouts, Summary of Scheme**. These outlined the object, reasons, and method of B.P.'s scheme, the subjects to be taught, the games to be used, and suggested that an inexpensive and illustrated handbook, **Scouting for Boys**, should accompany the scheme.

B.P. originally intended the scheme to be applicable - and not in opposition - to any existing organization for boys, such as, schools, boy's brigades, clubs, cadet corps, etc. or when such do not exist, it can be an organization of its own. What is most important is to place the greatest possible number of boys under good influence instead of them drifting towards hooliganism for want of a helping hand.

The Brown Sea Island Experiment

One question B.P. always asked of any scheme was 'will it work?' He, therefore, decided to try out his Boy Scout Scheme on real boys. Remembering his own happy boyhood and bearing in mind that the outdoor has so much to offer, he decided to have a camp in the country at which his ideas would be tested. The boys should be chosen from varying social backgrounds. He felt that sons of wealthy parents needed the training of a Scout quite as much as the poor. For B.P. class distinction is not what matters, the boys do.

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Thus, from July 29 until August 9, 1907 an experimental camp was held at Brownsea Island with 22 boys from varied social backgrounds, most of them the sons of farmers or laborers, placed under canvass.

They were roused each morning by a deep blast on the Koodoo Horn which B.P. had brought back from the Matabele Campaign. Days were spent in woodcraft and Scouting exercises while evenings will always find them gathered around a campfire listening to the yarns that B.P. told them and then to join together in prayer under the summer stars. After this they turn in to listen to the unfamiliar sounds of the night and to sleep the contented sleep that comes with fresh air and exercise and happiness.

The boys learned to make the calls of their patrols. The cry of the curlew was heard along the shores of Brownsea Island and bulls bellowed even in its woods. There was cooking over open fires, harpooning of log whales on the island's lake, stalking of each other and visitors to the Island. B.P. taught them the chant he heard from the Zulus, the Eengonyama.

The camp was originally planned for seven days, however, due to demands coming from the boys, it was extended for another three days. It was a real success. And B.P. was not the least surprised that this mixed group of boys was able to develop a team spirit so quickly and accomplish its tasks without orders - replaced by a code of honor - without thought of reward or punishment.

The camp proved that the Scouting Idea did work. All that remained now was to get down to writing the book. The Brownsea camp broke up on August 9, 1907. The history of Scouting had begun.

Scouting For Boys

Now certain that the Boy Scout Scheme is what the boys need, B.P. spent the days after Brownsea in completing his book, *Scouting For Boys*, consulting his mother from time to time who in turn pointed out to him far wider fields of usefulness for his schemes, and in promoting the Scheme through the first series of lectures which he conducted all over Britain with the assistance of the YMCA as part of the publicity campaign for the book. This undoubtedly led to the formation of many independent Patrols and Troops.

B.P.'s purpose in these lectures was two-fold:

1. to arouse public opinion to the need for providing for the thousands of boys who left school at the age of twelve and were no longer under good influence, and,
2. to expound the ideas of Scouting as a boys' sport to attract them to existing organizations, or failing at that, to form independent Scout Patrols.

The morning of January 16, 1908 was just like any other morning for the boys of Great Britain. Many of those who were over thirteen, and some who were under, went off to their work or elsewhere in the streets of London and the rest, went off to school. But for

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some of them, life has changed by the evening. They have bought the first of the six fortnightly parts of Scouting for Boys - by B.P. The book has no chapters but the pages were divided into a number of Campfire yarns. It was not a literary masterpiece. It lacked uniformity and by today's standard, it will be considered inconsistent and badly constructed. It was not an intellectual exercise. It contained nothing that conventional educators, priest or pastors, or even parents could incorporate into their educational program. It was meant for Boys and it sought to make life more interesting, more worthwhile and healthier for them. To this end, it suggested new games, new occupations, and new exercises without preaching or moralizing. It suggested in practical ways how they could live better and improve themselves.

The book sold out as soon as it appeared in the bookstands. It ranked third among the world's best sellers coming next to the Bible and Shakespeare. Fortnight by fortnight thousands of boys, and girls, bought the yarns and began to do the things BP suggested. It was these boys, who did not want to be Cadets or belong to a club or boys brigade, but who just wanted to be Scouts, who started the Scout Movement. For even before the sixth and final installment has appeared on the bookstand, Scout Patrols and Troops have appeared like mushrooms all over the empire. They meet under the lamp post and in vacant lots. Without any warning, chalk tracking appeared on pavements, campfires smoked on suburban commons, hardware stores sold out broom handles, knickerbockers were cut into shorts and the elderly were overwhelmed with offers of assistance as the boys went about doing their good turns.

It were these good turns which inspired many to introduce Scouting in other countries like India, the USA, Chili as early as 1909. And by 1912, Scouting has been started in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Ceylon, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria to name just those who still have Scouting today.

It is not difficult to see why boys were and are fascinated by the book. Its form, a series of campfire yarns, was in itself attractive, but it was the activities that captured them. In the book, they were encouraged to do just the things they wanted to do but had not been allowed to do. They were urged to light fires and cook out-of-doors; to go camping and exploring; to build huts and bridges; to play the detective in interpreting signs and tracks; to take part in Scouting games combining the craft of the red Indian with rough and tumble combats: in short, to enjoy the thrills of pioneering and back woodsmanship. Some boys were attracted because the scheme gave meaning to their interest in wild life; others because they needed an outlet for their romantic imaginings; some because the usual team games made no appeal to them. The boy gang, or secret society, was transformed into the Patrol and surprisingly found it encouraged instead of rebuked. Scouting was the answer to a hunger for outdoor life which no organization had been able to meet.

Because of these, whether B.P. wanted it or not, he suddenly found that he had an independent movement and not a part of any organization as he originally intended because the boys were already there all over Britain and the world calling themselves Scouts.