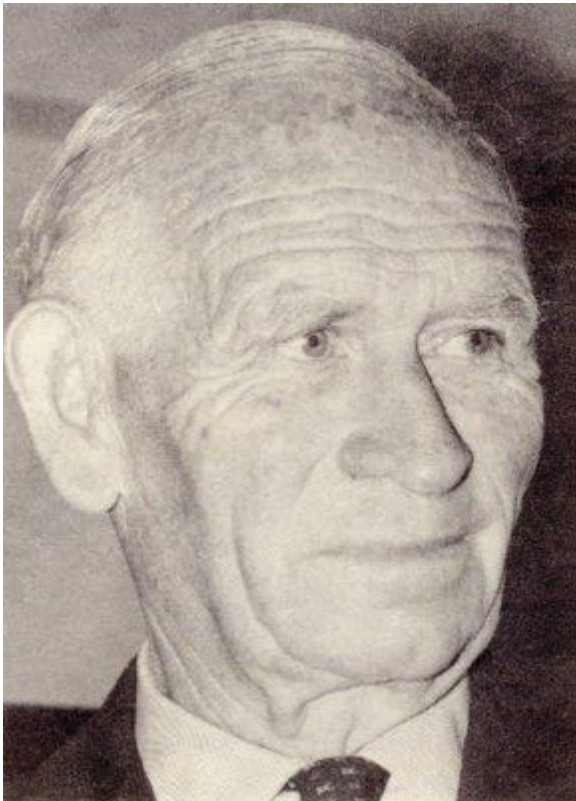




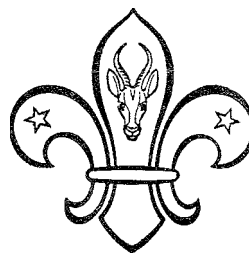
BADEN - POWELL AS EDUCATOR



A TRIBUTE TO THE FOUNDER of the Boy Scout Movement, published by the Boy Scouts of South Africa to commemorate, in 1967, the 60th Anniversary of Baden-Powell's first experimental Scout Camp on Brownsea Island, off the coast of Britain; and to celebrate the 12th World Jamboree in Idaho, United States of America, 1st to 9th of August, 1967.

BY

DR. ERNST G. MALHERBE



Former Principal
and
Vice-Chancellor
of the
University of Natal

When Baden-Powell died more than a quarter of a century ago, most of the tributes paid to him dwelt on his achievements as a soldier. While those may be great, yet it is strange that very few people seem to realise that in Baden-Powell we had one of the greatest educators of all time and one whose name will live in the history of education long after people have forgotten him as a military man.

I have been puzzled by this lack of recognition among professional educationists and particularly those who write books on the theory and history of education. A survey of the text-books which teachers study during their training at Normal Colleges, reveals pages and pages written about modern

educators like Matthew Arnold, Montessori, or de Croly, etc., or about methods like the Project Method or the Dalton Plan, but even in the most up-to-date ones there is hardly a line on Baden-Powell or a systematic treatment of his Boy Scout Movement. This omission is curious, because to my mind, the latter is of far greater and more fundamental significance than anyone of the others mentioned.

I am convinced that Baden - Powell's educational ideas will continue to live long after the Montessori system, for example, has come to be regarded merely as a museum curiosity. I think the comparison is a fair one, for Madame Montessori is a contemporary of Baden-Powell and her system has also been adopted in many countries.

This absence of due recognition in professional educational circles is a reflection on our educational theorists. It shows to what extent our professional education has become divorced from the concrete realities of life, character building and the spirit of service. Merely because Baden-Powell did not put his ideas into the jargon of the education text-book writer, nor formulated in philosophical terms the underlying principles of his scheme, they seem to have overlooked him.

What is to my mind of crucial importance is that he chose to embody his ideas in a concrete organisation which has shown a vitality hardly equalled by any other modern educational movement, instead of worrying about theories. That power to grow was due to the fact that his fundamental psychological principles were sound. It developed because his organisation supplied a vital lack in the educational regimen of the boy or girl who has to grow up under the conditions of modern civilisation. He brought them into close touch with nature and the valuable lessons in alert observation and patience which the great out-of-doors could teach them. What is more, he concentrated on the young adolescent during that period of his life when he is thrown into a flat spin by the complexities of our artificial modes of life. Our modern civilisation ordinarily does not give an urban youngster a chance to live out those almost primitive instinctive urges at the time they make themselves felt in his nervous system. It is at this period that the Scout Movement offers him a healthy and satisfying outlet.

To advanced students who came to consult me about a subject for a Ph. D. thesis, I have often said: "Why don't you write a thesis on the psychological basis of the Boy Scout Movement? It involves the psychology of the adolescent probably the most difficult time in a person's life, and is a study with fascinating possibilities. I realised those possibilities for the first time when as a student at Columbia, I worked in a big Boy Scout Camp on the lakes in upper New York State, and had charge of a group of boys. Unfortunately, continual commitment to other pieces of research have kept me from doing it myself. Here is your chance, however, to do something worthwhile."

Unfortunately, however, the persons who consulted me thus, either knew psychology but nothing intimate about Scouting, or knew about Scout work but had a poor background in the psychology and philosophy of education. And so this job has, to my knowledge, never been tackled in a really systematic fashion.

In what lies Baden-Powell's great educational contribution? I have already hinted at it. In simple terms I may restate it as follows: Baden-Powell has succeeded in devising an organisation which gives boys and girls a new interest in life at a time when most of them lose grip on their environment (chiefly their schoolwork) and on themselves. From the onset of puberty the boy goes through a very difficult period of emotional stress. With some this period of *sturm und drang* lasts a short while; with others years. It is the transition period from

childhood to manhood. Physiological changes take place within him and they make him restless. The same, of course, applies to girls. At this stage youngsters begin to feel grown-up in some respects and want the privileges and freedom of the adult, while many of their reactions are still perfectly childish. They are betwixt and between: "Too big for a serviette and too small for a table cloth", as the South African saying goes. In many cases they become disciplinary problems for their parents or their teachers. Routine school work begins to irk them. They begin to have romantic feelings. They have an almost irresistible desire for adventure and roaming. Their whole being cries out for a regime which offers them new opportunities and new outlets.

Now it is just here where the contribution of Baden-Powell comes in. Intuitively he realised that you must at this critical juncture give a child a new interest. If you don't, a tremendous educational opportunity is lost for ever. It is to catch this flood of new energy that wells up in youth and to sublimate it by guiding it into psychologically useful channels that he built up the Scout organisation.

Scouting provides the necessary action and adventure which the boy craves. Above all, it provides that activity in a social medium in which hero-worship, loyalty and service to others get plenty of chance to be exercised. New vistas of knowledge closely connected with the realities of life (at any rate what are realities at the time for the youngster) are opened up, and new skills are acquired through camping and the varied programme of exercises outlined in the Scout Manual. He thus gets angles on life which the school with its formal subjects does not provide, and he retains his balance as a human being. Life, which formerly was puzzling and purposeless, now becomes for him a more happy and worthwhile affair.

As I said before, to trace these principles at work in each of the detailed activities comprised by the whole Scout Movement, is a task that would require a Ph.D. dissertation at least.

There are, however, three more points to be made.

1. The ideas underlying the Scout Movement which has spread to over 80 countries, had their origin in South Africa. It grew out of Baden-Powell's experiences as a soldier in the Bushveld of the Northern Transvaal and Rhodesia, during the Matabele Wars of last century and subsequently during the Anglo-Boer War, where he took a prominent part in the relief of Mafeking.

In his military career, he had been immensely impressed by the possibilities of Scouting reconnaissance. These possibilities were brought home to him in two ways. First, during the Matabele Wars he had come in contact with the two famous American Scouts, Burnham and Ingram, who had acquired fame as woodsmen among the Red Indians from whom they had learnt their woodcraft.

Second, the Imperial Army with which he was subsequently associated in fighting the "Boers", had suffered many unexpected reverses because of the latter's superiority in scouting methods. To their cost the British soldiers had to discover that they had to do with an opposing force where every individual had learnt since boyhood the art of noticing the smallest detail in the veld and of connecting its meaning.

Being a "Boer" myself, I vividly remember how as a boy in that War, I accompanied my father "on Commando" and how at nights round the camp-fire under the bright, starry skies of the Orange Free State, I used to listen breathlessly to the stories of the daring exploits of General de Wet and his clever scouts. I remember how it thrilled me to hear how effectively they outwitted the vastly superior numbers of English troops, whom we in those days regarded as particularly stupid in their naive attempts to catch de Wet.

Wars seldom do good. If they do, the good is usually of a negative character. They destroy and they purge. Here, however, we have the germ of an idea pregnant with positive good originating in war. And though the South African War brought much suffering and unhappiness to us, and a subsequent bitterness which even to the present day complicates our political situation, Baden-Powell's contribution is something fine, which, like a beautiful flower, has grown out of the dirt and sordidness of wars.

Incidentally, I found that to a number of Scoutmasters in America this story of the origin of the Boy Scout Movement came as something new. Somehow they had come to regard it as a Movement more or less uniquely American in origin. In a sense this attitude is understandable because, under the leadership of men like Dan Beard, America has embodied into its Scouting numerous exercises and practices taken from the highly developed woodcraft-lore of the Red Indians, so that Scouting in America has a distinctively indigenous colour. Similar adaptations of Baden-Powell's ideas have, of course, been made in other countries, though definitely on a lesser scale than in North America. Thus even in South Africa we have amongst the Afrikaans-speaking section of our population the "Voortrekker" Movement which is an attempt to express Baden-Powell's principles in terms of the activities associated with the early pioneer life amongst the Voortrekkers who moved Northwards on the Great Trek from the Cape Colony in the 1830's.

While the detailed content may differ in different countries, the underlying purpose is the same. Its scope is unlimited by class, creed, colour or political distinctions. And today, long after the ashes of Baden-Powell have been laid to rest under the big trees of Kenya in the bosom of the continent where he received his inspiration, there are over 10,000,000 Scouts (apart from the many millions of men who were Scouts in their youth) who should be paying homage to the man who conceived this idea of training boys in the fundamentals of the brotherhood of man - for such brotherhood can come, after all, only, as Socrates pointed out more than 2,000 years ago, from a harmony of the inward soul.

2. Unfortunately, on the same basic psychological principles, which are fundamental in human nature, youth movements in Germany were built up during the years preceding the 1939-45 War, but with a different purpose. These organisations can be regarded as baneful perversions of the Baden-Powell movement. Loyalty to the group and the spirit of service which find such fine expression in the Boy Scout Movement, because it operates in an atmosphere of freedom and friendship, was exploited by the Nazis to the ninth degree, in order to instil into their adolescents feelings of race superiority and unquestioning obedience to the State, i.e. the Führer and his regime. Theirs was, however, a discipline based on compulsion and fear. Where Baden-Powell's organisation gives youth ever greater freedom and mastery through the development of skill and self-control and where friendship transcends the limits of race, class or creed, the Nazi movements enslaved and isolated their young people by putting their souls behind prison bars where nothing but hatred of other peoples and prejudices grow - like pale, dank weeds in a dungeon.

3. It is only when a big tree has fallen that people realise its height. So it is, alas, with many a great man as history has shown us over and over again. Baden-Powell was a great man because he conceived a great idea and embodied it in a great organisation - a movement from which millions of young people have benefitted - young people from many nations, creeds and races.

While formal recognition in the pedagogic world has thus far been lacking, I am willing to wager that when the history of education in the 20th century comes to be written one day, Baden-Powell will be pointed to as one of the greatest educators that the world produced during the first half of that century.