

A DISCOVERY

Sir Robert Baden-Powell was a soldier in the English army. For a number of years he was removed from the environment of the highly complex civilized life of Europe by his services as an officer among the Boers and British recruits in South Africa. His position as an officer enabled him to study intimately the comparative value of the two different types of soldiers. During this experience he made the startling discovery that natives enlisting for service were better soldiers than were the recruits (products of social conditions in congested manufacturing cities and the English public-school system) sent from Great Britain. They were with all their lack of text-book education more resourceful, more enterprising, and more capable of handling themselves in the exigencies of camp life.

Recruits from England, on the other hand, had little conception of service or personal responsibility. Few of them knew how to care for themselves, fewer still were of much value as intelligent soldiers. They were dependent, sluggish, irresolute and, on the whole, grossly lacking in initiative and qualities of leadership. Evidently the primitive education of the natives was doing more for its people to develop self-reliance, hardihood, strong manhood, and sound character than was the more advanced education of the English. Civilization was depriving men of the essentials of character development. The cause, General Baden-Powell concluded, existed in the fact that too much attention was being given to teaching boys from books and too little attention given to teaching them from practice and first-hand contact with men and things. The effect was loss of virility, manhood, and character.