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# Blazes on the Trail

## No. 2
## THE RISE OF THE WOODCRAFT INDIANS

BY
ERNEST THOMPSON SETON
*Chief of the Woodcraft League*

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# Lifecraft or Woodcraft
# The Four-Fold Way

*By* ERNEST THOMPSON SETON

I had a vision for my people,—a man of perfect manhood, a being physically robust, an athlete, an outdoors man, accustomed to brunt of flood, wind and sun—rough road and open spaces—a man wise in the ways of the woods, sagacious in council, dignified, courteous, respectful to all, and kindly as a good-natured giant; a man whose life was clean, picturesque, heroic and unsordid; a man of courage, equipped for emergencies, possessing his soul at all times, and filled with a religion that consists, not of mere occasional observances, not of vague merits hoarded in the skies, but of a strong kind spirit that makes him desired and helpful here today.

This was my dream, my hope for the race. And I looked in vain among our churches, schools or nation-keepers for any guide to realize this man. In not one of the great foundations that are out avowedly to breed high manhood did I find any picture, any plan or pattern that conformed to what I knew was right; not one that could offer any but a figure narrow, distorted or incomplete.

This is why I turned to the history of our race, and found in the Woodcraft Way an answer telling how we had so far climbed. Of this I have no doubt today. And since the trail is not yet ended, it leads perhaps to the highest hill of all.

With this in mind, I have written of the Woodcraft Way.

FOOTNOTE—In formulating this thought, I confess that I have never studied psychology in an academic sense, not even in books. My approach has been purely observational and empirical. And yet I have had the endorsement of every expert psychologist to whose judgment this scheme and its activities have been submitted.

# The Need For It

An eminent educator said to me long ago, "What is this Woodcraft idea that you keep hammering at?"

I said: "Do you want me to tell it long or tell it short?"

He replied: "Just as short as you can cut it."

"Then, it is a man-making scheme with a blue-sky background."

"That sounds all right, but does not give any idea of its methods, or its distinctive features. Give me more details."

"It is something to do, something to think about, something to remember, in the woods, realizing all the time that *manhood, not scholarship,* is the highest aim of education; and that the most important thing in America today is the character of our young people."

It has been said that character is formed before the age of ten. To be more exact, we should say chiefly in childhood. After that, it will develop, but not change fundamentally. Surely, therefore, childhood and its proper activities are most important. They determine the future of the nation.

We must realize that our country is today suffering under a wave of juvenile crime. To explain its cause or extent is of less profit than to find a remedy.

There are two widely different schools among those who study the problem:

First, the *Compulsionists,* who believe that all boys are born bad, are children of the devil, and can be redeemed only by some special nostrum of external application. Of this class are the militarists. They deal chiefly with drills, don'ts, compulsory regulations, and external physical things.

They probably found their logical climax some sixty years ago. There was at that time much exploitation of the pseudo-science of phrenology. A group of philanthropists saw in this a way to reform mankind beginning in the



jails. They invented an iron mask or cap that set firmly on the head of the person to be reformed. If the criminal's bump of reverence was, as usual, a depression, then suction was applied to this part till it slowly came up to level. If his bump of destructiveness was too large, a steady screw-and-clamp pressure would in a month or two reduce it to normal, or even create a hollow. In this way, all criminal mankind was to be saved, their characters remodelled—from the outside. How beautiful! How convincing! And yet this very thing, in a slightly different way, is the mode of the Compulsionists today, with jail as the chosen laboratory for extreme cases.

The second class are the *Developmentalists,* who believe that all boys (with rare exceptions) are born good, are the children of God, and need only to be developed under sound leadership. Of this class are the Woodcrafters. They deal chiefly with the natural instincts of the growing child, offering a vast range of developmental activities, spiritual as well as physical, the choice of which is left to the child's free will, within certain reasonable limits dictated by mature judgment and experience. If an instinct is going wrong, they divert it, not crush it, holding that all natural instincts are ready-made power. Their chosen laboratory is outdoor life, especially in camps.

As we have seen, children are not born bad. They are born good, and made bad by wrong methods of bringing up, and especially, wrong methods of recreation. Why should we let them be deformed, and then, in their teens, set about reforming them? How much simpler and better to take them in early childhood and prevent their ever being deformed.

If the roof is leaking, we do not paste paper on the parlor ceiling. If the street is flooded by a water main, we do not go at it with a broom. No, if we are wise, we begin at the source; we repair the roof; we turn off the hydrant.

This is our plan with youthful wrong-doing. Jails and

punishments are little better than brooms against a flood. We go to the source, which is, nearly always, superabundant animal energy and love of play, not properly guided in childhood, the character-forming epoch. Our job is to direct this play.

## The Ideal

No scheme of lifecraft can have appealing force and effective growth as a mere doctrine. Greek history abounds in bright dreams, plans for an ideal life, that never got anywhere because they were simply doctrines.

A visible embodiment is essential. Every great religion or scheme of life that has moved the world had with its preachment a visible example, an exemplar, to which men could point, so that the simplest-minded, the most illiterate, could, in a measure, comprehend.

With this thought in mind, I turned first to the heroes of our own race—King Arthur, Lief Ericssen, Rollo the Sea King. But these were too shadowy, or had no special reference to primitive life in America.

Robin Hood, my childhood's hero, I dismissed for similar reasons; also because when stripped of all glamor, he was a mere bandit, the British analogue of Jesse James.

Quite early, I discussed the pioneers of our own nation, the men who penetrated, and eventually possessed, the West. But, alas, I knew these men too well. For some thirty years, I had known them intimately; not less than a score of those whose names are large-writ on Western history's page, were my personal friends or acquaintances. And I find it difficult to discover any good thing I might say of them. The one virtue that they continually vaunted, and in some measure had, was physical courage. But it was of the type that was founded on superior weapons, superior numbers, and the certainty of rescue. As General Nelson A. Miles said to me: "I should be very sorry to see American boys pattern after our Border Scouts in any particular."



The best that could be said of the best and most famous of these Western men—and his avowed eulogist so phrased it—was that he was "almost as good as an Indian."

History, logic, and my instincts, all pointed one way—the ideal Indian was the cleanest, strongest, manliest, most unsordid type that I could find. Nevertheless, it went not with my thought to select a visioned ideal. I wanted a person. And, without further hesitation, I turned to Tecumseh, the great Redman, the personal embodiment of all that was good in the Red race, a man without fear, without reproach, the noblest figure, undoubtedly, that glorifies American history's page.

"Why," said a friend of wisdom and of high ideals, "did you not select the Man of Nazareth?"

"For three reasons," I replied. "First, His name has been so much used, and abused, with nauseating Sunday School methods that mere mention would repel the very groups I hope to reach. Second, He was not an athlete, an outdoor man, a camper, a man's man, with especial message for America. Third, it is not safe in any field to set the standard over-high. If I were leading a gang of trampers on the Shasta climb, I would not dare to say: 'Come, now, we will climb to the appalling summit of the snow peak.' No, I should rather say: 'Come, ye brave ones, we will now make Sheep-rock Shoulder'; and in my heart still hold the thought that those who make that crag are proven strong and staunch. To them, on a later day, I should say: 'Now, ye Minisinos, ye tried and proven, we may attempt the dome that towers above the clouds.' "

## Early History

From my school-days, I have been actively interested in Woodcraft. In 1874, I organized a Robin Hood Club in Toronto, for the pursuit of woodcraft in its present sense. It did not last more than two years, but the idea did; and it came more clearly to me that woodcraft, being the earliest

pursuit of man, was the proper interest in early life,—was a school for manhood.

In numerous articles in *Forest and Stream, St. Nicholas, Scribner's, Animal Friends,* and in other magazines in the 80's, I published parts of the idea. In 1896, I set about formulating it.

In 1898, I met Rudyard Kipling, and told him of my dream,—that outdoor life with simple pleasures and woodcraft pursuits was the proper school for manhood, which is the real aim of education.

Kipling was profoundly impressed, and said: "If you don't get it across in a national way, the Chinamen will be sitting astride our necks within fifty years." Then he added: "How are you going to land it?"

I replied: "I am writing a dictionary of woodcraft."

"Oh, rot!" he exclaimed, "who would ever read a dictionary?"

"Well, what would you do?"

"I'd put it in a novel," he said.

So I wrote the TWO LITTLE SAVAGES.

Kipling read it and commented: "It is far too informational."

"But I have not fully told my story," I replied.

"Then write another novel."

So I wrote ROLF IN THE WOODS, and even then had not quite delivered my message. After all, I had to publish my DICTIONARY OF WOODCRAFT, as well as the BIRCH BARK ROLL. All of these are going strong today, the BIRCH BARK ROLL in its twenty-first edition.

Using these as the guides, there are now Woodcraft Tribes in England, Ireland, Canada, South Africa, Czechoslovakia, Poland; and groups forming in Russia, Germany, India and Japan. This does not take account of many that use these books as manuals, but work under some other organizational name.

In 1901, I offered the idea to the *Ladies' Home Journal*.



It appeared in their issue for May, 1902. I called it "Woodcraft Indians," and used Indian titles for my officers and groups.

The idea took well and widely. In 1904, I went to England to implant the method, and had some success. In 1905, I sought help of Lord Roberts, knowing something of his work among boys. He said: "Why don't you get in touch with Baden-Powell. He is the Chief Scout of the Army, and might be interested enough to help you."

In 1906, therefore, I sent Baden-Powell a copy of the BIRCH BARK ROLL or WOODCRAFT MANUAL, sixth edition. This was the one that he followed in selecting activities for the Boy Scouts.

## The Power of Instincts

I was brought up in a very ancient school of theology, one that teaches that every human impulse is the direct instigation of the Devil, and must be stamped out; it is the Old Adam.

I had to see much of life, travel far, and get biological experience of vast entent, before I took the wholly different view,—that our instincts are our priceless, our best inheritance, the garnered wisdom of our race, the transmitted urges that, out of brutish material and experience, created us a great people.

Along this line, I thought and grew, and realized at length that every strongly marked human instinct is power to be reckoned with, especially in the young. Instincts may lead aright, or may lead awrong. But still they are power, to be used, never to be thwarted or destroyed. It is the part of the leader to turn every instinct of the child to constructive account.

The instincts are like the life forces of a tree, the power that is continually compelling and inspiring growth, development, search for the light. The exact shape and direction of that growth may be modified by externals. It is the province of the teacher to manipulate these externals.

# The Woodcraft Idea

As already set forth, the character of our young people is the most important thing in America today.

Character is formed chiefly in childhood. After that, it will develop, but not change.

The proper business of childhood is play,—not learning to work, not learning to be a soldier, not learning to be a citizen, not learning to be a scholar,—but to *play*.

The four chief agencies at work in character formation (we leave out heredity, because it cannot be controlled or explained at present) are church, home, school, and playground. For reasons, regrettable and not understood, the first two have largely lost their hold. The third has greatly increased in power and consequence; but the last has come to be most important. The boy cares little what the teacher or the preacher thinks, "and Dad doesn't understand." But he does care what "the fellers that he plays with think." The opinion of the gang is everything; gang instinct is the real religion of the normal boy.

What is the use of ignoring the fact? Why not accept and use it? He is simply going through an ancestral experience. It was through woodcraft pursuits and gang government that our race attained manhood; and our children go through those same experiences.

That is what woodcraft does. It is a plan to utilize in their natural succession the normal stages of our growth. It is organized play, outdoors, with a view to character-building.

It assumes development along four different lines,—the Body Way, the Mind Way, the Spirit Way, and the Service Way. No program of man-making can be perfect that does not definitely recognize these, and in this order. They are symbolized in our Sand Painting around the Fire, which Fire is the symbol of the Great Spirit. All of our twelve laws are grouped around this, and all our thousand activities are related to the laws.



The Woodcraft aims, first to *make a man*. Then, when he is nearing a manhood, the nation can make of him a soldier or a shoemaker or a teacher, according to the gift of the individual and the need of the time.

# The Succession of Instincts

Woodcraft *utilizes every human instinct*, guiding and considering them as precious, ready-made power.

There is a fairly definite succession of instincts that mark and help the growth of the human being. These are too complex for full listing, and too variant for hard ruling. But, as a broad proposition, we recognize:

(a) In childhood, the PLAY instinct first; and, dominant with it, the dream-land life, the delight in animals that talk, dolls that think. Fairy tales are preferred, and are accepted literally. At about seven or eight, the GANG instinct appears, and at about ten becomes the absolute religion of the boy at least. He may be taught to recite catechism—Scripture verses—with his lips, but his real loyalty and standards are in the gang.

According to many authorities, half our boys go wrong, make a failure of life, are more or less of a burden on society, and in a large and unnecessary proportion, become criminals. Some sociologists have put the number higher than half, some lower. But whatever it may be, there is a vast, deplorable wastage.

Why? Are fifty per cent. of the boys born bad? Certainly not! Modern science tells us that about one in two thousand is born bad,—that is, a pervert, a moron, one destined to be a nuisance, a pathological case that needs hospital treatment—not jail.

How, then, is it that we have fifty per cent. going bad? The answer is simple: Wrong methods of upbringing, and especially, wrong methods of amusement. The first false step is nearly always taken under the thoughtless, boisterous

desire to have some fun, to blow off superfluous animal energy; and not knowing how else to do it, the boy gets into mischief. Wrong play has more to do with making boys bad than wrong preaching.

Thus, childhood is not only playtime; it is also character-building time. The well-known saying of a great church is: "If *we* have them till they are ten, we care not *who* may try to influence them afterward." This, though maybe not entirely true, has truth in it. What overwhelming importance does it give to childhood—and so to play!

(b) At about ten or twelve, the GANG instinct is even stronger, and the dream period is displaced by the CAVEMAN OR HUNTER period. Therefore, in this age, natural history is all-powerful. Every boy wants to be a hunter. He collects birds' eggs, and is mad for a gun. At the same time, there comes a tremendous and growing interest in athletics. The girls abandon their dollies now, and want real stories of life rather than fairy tales.

(c) With puberty, come many great changes. For reasons not well understood, the SEX instinct and the RELIGIOUS instinct develop together.

This is the moment selected by the churches for confirmation,—that is, public affirmation of creed.

The boy is, above all things at this time, thinking of his strength, his muscle; and the girl, of her beauty.

Now, for the first time, the youth begins fully to realize his country; but his interest in it is chiefly centered on heroic, historical personages, especially if athletes or conquerors. This is the age of HERO-WORSHIP.

(d) While differing greatly in individuals, the fourth period sets in at about sixteen or eighteen. Now—and not till now—with manhood and womanhood in sight, the idea of responsibility possesses the youth,—the idea of service sets in. Now the boys want to be soldiers; the girls want to be nurses and teachers. Patriotism takes on a definite sense of relationship to one's country. This is the time—and the earliest time—at which any military ideas



should be injected or encouraged; this is the time when civic relationship becomes a reality. This is the earliest epoch when the daily good turn, the notion of unselfish service, can really enter into the life of the youth, to be a permanent and constructive force.

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This succession of instincts takes place in every normal human being. The wise educator who aims at making a man or a woman, will accept these, and in this succession. With such ready-made power, such sympathetic activities and material, the educator's task is an easy and pleasant one.

Nevertheless, there are well-meaning leaders who, with their own groups, have changed this orderly, natural succession, some who have tried to inject into childhood the spirit of lofty service, requiring each to commit an altruism every day, and advertise the fact when done; some who would saturate the child mind with notions of patriotism and military thought, of police service, or of civic duties.

These inversions, under skilful leadership, have given results that, in many cases, were, on the face of them, quite pleasing; but my original and instinctive distrust is justified by the final outcome.

It is exactly like forcing an orchid to bloom two seasons ahead of its time, by using electric lights, blue glass and chemicals. Yes, it flowers, gives a very pretty bloom—*but it dies early, and it never seeds.* That is the inevitable result of inverting nature's developmental plan.

For these reasons, Woodcraft adheres to the scheme of natural sequence.

## Characteristics of the Woodcraft

The Woodcraft takes as its basis the primitive of each country, refined and adapted for present-day use. In America, the ideal Red Indian is the model.

The Woodcraft works primarily with recreation, and teaches fun not bought with money.

The Woodcraft avowedly offers guidance along the four pathways,—body, mind, spirit and service.

The Woodcraft is the only one that takes in both sexes and all ages; it deals with kiddies, grown-ups, and the family as a unit; therefore, does not overlap the field of any other organization.

The Woodcraft binds the family together instead of sending each on a different way.

The Woodcraft would end the crime wave at its source, that is, in childhood.

The Woodcraft has no military features, such as drill, salute, bugles, soldier uniform, army titles for officers, military methods and ideals. It uses instead Indian titles, organization and color.

The Woodcraft continually offers to its followers a choice of ways, avoiding any rigid standardization.

The Woodcraft definitely recognizes and uses all the developmental instincts during the whole period of growth.

The Woodcraft offers self-government with tribal forms and adult guidance.

The Woodcraft aims at a minimum of clothing.

The Woodcraft urges on all as far as possible, a regular and reasonable sunbath, a daily contact with the glory in the sky.

The Woodcraft conjures with the magic of the campfire, the decorum of the Council Ring, the glamor of atmosphere and little customs, with Red Indian color and thought .

The Woodcraft adheres to honors by standards, not by competition.

The Woodcraft emphasizes picturesqueness in everything, the touch of beauty and romance in dwelling, camp, costume, badges, ceremonies and imagination.

The Woodcraft is the only one dictated by the children to the grown-ups; the others were dictated by the grown-ups to the children.



The Woodcraft is the oldest of the American outdoor organizations (1902).

## Summary

This, in brief is my dream. Our children are not the offspring of the devil, but come to us fresh from God. They are the highborn heirs of a life that is clean, simple and noble. They do not need to be reformed, but rather saved from being deformed. Even as a tree is driven by the continual urge from within, needing only room, rain, sun and food from without, so our children are absolutely swayed and motivated by their inherited instincts. These are the successive forces of growth and development. These are God-implanted, and need no generative touch from us. All they require is opportunity, activities, and direction. These things it is the Woodcraft plan and privilege to furnish.

While all ages are considered in our program, we realize that childhood is the cardinal period in character-making. On this, chiefly, then, we focus our thoughts and our force. For on this period and on these activities turn the character of our young people.

If we can have our youth bred in this, the Woodcraft Way, we need worry no more about the crime wave. There will be no crime wave.

Having taken care of the character of our youth, all other issues will take care of themselves.

## The Variants

Within a few years of our foundation, the schisms and variants began. One accepted the activities, but held up a lot of border ruffians as the ideal. Another gave military

color, and held up Tommy Atkins as the perfect type. Another adopted savage customs merely because they were primitive, not knowing the difference between *simple* and *savage*. Others tried to inject into tender minds the beauties of altruism and the complex duties and responsibilities of a thoughtful citizen many epochs before the sane and natural time. Still another, misled by externals, made Indian costume and games the sum total of effort. Another used this Woodcraft thought for a mask to popularize trade and agricultural schools. And, of course, many, seeking to sail with the wind, seized on the organization and activities as effective vehicles in which to convey their own ecclesiastical propaganda.

All of these are blind and obviously meretricious perversions. What wonder that they have come, or are coming, to naught. The few of them that are continuing to grow have returned, more or less, to the pure Woodcraft doctrine,—that is, high manhood attained by following the same trail that brought us so far on the way.

This, in short, was the history of my thought. I first begot my dream, and then chose the Indian because he was the embodiment of it.