HOW WE TEACH GEOGRAPHY.

BY JANET R. SMITH.

We are now to deal with the teaching of geography upon the lines suggested by Miss Mason in her book, *School Education*, and carried out in the Parents' Union School. I will read you an extract from the book, which shows the two underlying principles, on which we base our lessons. "Geography is to my mind a subject of high educational value though not because it affords the means of scientific training. . . . . The peculiar value of geography lies in its fitness to nourish the mind with ideas, and to furnish the imagination with pictures. Herein lies the educational value of geography."

It will be seen from the above that the two principles are:—

1.—That the mind must be nourished with living ideas.

2.—That the imagination must be furnished with pictures.

To these we may add a third:

3.—That geography must always be associated with experience.

In order to carry out our first principle, we must see, that the child has the best and most interesting books on the subject that can be procured.

[p 523]

That we may realize our second principle, we must by picture and story, and an intelligent study of the map, so appeal to his powers of imagination that he will not forget what he has heard, but will be filled with a living interest in the place under consideration.

And for the 3rd, we must see that he has some experience as a geographer on his own account, however elementary that experience may be.

CLASSES Ia. AND Ib.

First of all we will consider the geography which is learnt in Classes Ia. and Ib., of the Parents' Union School, where the children's ages range from six to nine years.

The first and fundamental ideas are gained best out of doors. The child realizes the meaning of distance by counting the paces he has to take in order to get to different objects. He will find that one garden path is perhaps ten paces long, whereas the other is fourteen paces; that, in the park, it takes twelve paces to reach the oak tree, starting from the end of the fence, while it takes only five paces to reach the plane. This interests him, and he is ready to appreciate the meaning of distance as shown by the lines of latitude when the time comes for teaching it. He is ready also to understand the necessity of finding direction, which should form his next lesson.

He might learn the four Cardinal Points in the following way. Take him out at noon and tell him first to face the sun, and then to turn his back on it. Then tell him that when facing the sun he was looking south and now he is looking north, which is exactly the opposite direction. Now, let him lift his arms sideways to shoulder level, then his right arm will be pointing to the east and his left to the west. He might then take four pegs and put them in the ground at even distances to signify the four Cardinal Points, tying a piece of string from the north to the south peg, and another piece from the east to the west peg, so making a compass on the ground, by the help of which he will be able to tell the direction of the various objects in the garden.

Another way would be to let him scratch the lines of direction on the garden path, only that would not last so long. When he has grasped the meaning of the four Cardinal Points he should be shown how to use the
[p 524]
compass, and required to give the direction of the various landmarks in the neighbourhood, such as the church, the castle, the wood, etc.

A good way of showing the earth's change of position with regard to the sun is to fix a post or long stick in the ground in some convenient place. Then let the children go out at 9, 12 and 3 o'clock and notice the different directions of the shadow cast and its different lengths. Let them mark along the shadow with a brush and whitewash. They will then notice how the shadow lies always in the same direction at the same hour though it be longer or shorter according to the time of the year.

Geographical definitions can be taught by the way as the necessity arises: a pond if necessary will represent a lake; a hillock, a mountain; a stream, a river, with its source, mouth and two banks. The child should act as explorer and find the source, mouth, watershed, and basin of the miniature river.

The idea of boundaries can be given, by taking any field and finding its position with regard to the points of the compass. Then the child would be required to give the boundaries on the north, south, east and west. For example, a certain field might be bounded by a river on the north, a road on the east, a cornfield on the south, and a meadow on the west.

From the combined ideas of distance, direction, and boundaries the plan follows. To begin with, the schoolroom may be paced and its aspect located. Then follows the drawing of the plan to scale on the blackboard, putting in the boundaries and marking the little compass in the corner. More difficult plans follow, of field, orchard, and garden, and always the distance is paced, the direction discovered by a compass, and the boundaries marked. It is needless to say that children like this sort of geography lesson, and look upon it more as a game, than as work. If there is more than one child pacing, it is a good plan to let one pace say twenty steps, and another, the next twenty, and so on. This will keep everyone interested in what is being done.

Indoors, the children should make the various physical features, such as an island, mountain, lake, cape, etc., in sand, or they might model them in clay.

Often a child finds it difficult to grasp the fact that there
[p 525]
are other countries besides his own. This may be made easier by taking the parish as an example of the country and neighbouring parishes to represent foreign countries. The child could be prepared for the study of countries by studying the parish in the following way. The teacher, with the aid of an ordnance map can determine the boundaries, which the child could perhaps walk: the northern boundary on one day, the southern on another, and so on. He could discover the streams flowing through his parish and find out where they come from, and where they are going, the village would represent the capital; the ponds, lakes, etc. If there were real rivers, lakes and islands, so much the better. Then he could make a rough sketch map of his parish, by doing which, he will become interested in the maps of countries when he comes to look at them.

After giving him the idea that there are other countries besides our own, the teacher should show him the map of the world and some of the countries should be pointed out to him

and stories told about them. The *World at Home* is a very good book to use for this purpose, as it is full of most interesting stories about all countries.

Once a week, a lesson is given on some interesting place which is being spoken of in the papers, or that the child's parents have visited.

The child learns where this place is, and how you would get there from Great Britain. He learns the special interest attaching to it, and with the help of picture postcards and good descriptions is able to imagine what it is like. Then follows a rough sketch map showing where it is situated, etc.

The books used in these Classes are *The World at Home* in Ia., and *The Ambleside Geography Reader*, Book I., in Ib.

CLASS II.

In Class II., the children are from nine to twelve years of age. They are given a fuller knowledge of the countries of the world, using the *Ambleside Reader*, Book II. They also gain some knowledge of the counties of England which they study very carefully in Book III. of the same series, giving particular attention to map work. We always begin by a study of the
[p 526]
map for the new lesson and by answering questions on the map of the last lesson. After every lesson the children should be able to describe each region in a blank map, putting in names. The little blackboards which can be got at the Parents' Union Office, 26, Victoria Street, are more useful for these maps than paper, as there is then no difficulty about rubbing out, and less time is wasted.

Books of Travel are read to the children and they make rough sketch maps illustrating the traveller's route on different expeditions. Perhaps it would interest you to hear the general scheme of a geography lesson in Class II. Take for example, an introductory lesson on the Continent of Africa. First the children look at the map and give the position of Africa with regard to the rest of the world, the boundaries, shape, physical features, divisions and the chief centres of its population. The teacher then proceeds to draw from the children what scenery they would expect, from their study of the map, to find in the different parts, what the climate would be like, what the products and industries would be and what their characteristics. Then let the children read the lesson given in the *Ambleside Geography*, after which they would tell both what they had gathered from the map, and what they had read. At the end of the lesson they fill in on a blank map the chief physical features, names of countries, etc.

CLASS III.

The children in Class III., whose ages range from twelve to fourteen, study Europe very carefully, country by country, in Book IV., and also gain some knowledge of the other continents in Book V. As in Class II., they learn the new map at the beginning of the lesson, and fill in the blank map afterwards. The lesson follows the same general outlines as in Class II., throughout, the great aim of the teacher being to draw as much as possible from the pupils.

Physical geography lessons are also given from Arnold Forster's *This World of Ours*, on such subjects as "The Seasons," the use of Latitude and Longitude, climate, geography connected with geology, etc. Political geography is also touched on, and such political changes as are now taking place in the

[p 527]
Balkan Peninsula are noticed. In both Classes II. and III., places coming under notice in the current newspapers, such as Adrianople and Mexico, are made the subject of lessons, and pictures are shown and rough sketch maps drawn illustrating the relative positions of these towns.

In all these lessons the blackboard is an invaluable help, and should be used freely for maps, headings, and names.

CLASS IV.

In Class IV. the girls take geography connected with historical developments, reading Seeley's *Expansion of England*, and study the places coming into notice in the newspapers, making sketch maps of the places in question. Book V. of the *Ambleside Geography* is taken, in connection with which they read many books of travel and research, and so keep in touch with all the latest discoveries in the geographical world. They study Sir Archibald Geikie's *Physical Geography*, also Mort's *Practical Geography*, which includes the study and proper use of the Ordnance Survey Maps.

Classes II., III. and IV., do their Local Geography on walks. They study the Ordnance Survey Map of their district, find the heights of trees and hills and the breadth of rivers. If possible, they trace a river from its source to its mouth, and discover its basin, watershed and tributaries. They learn the geology of their district, also the history from the earliest times, discovering, where possible, traces of the early inhabitants in the looks and dialect of the people of to-day, and in place-names. Parochial, parliamentary, and county boundaries are determined, and the reasons for these divisions discussed.

Geography as we understand it is not an isolated subject to be taught in an air-tight compartment excluding every other interest. It is connected with Astronomy, Geology, Mathematics, History, and even the Arts. For it is upon climatic conditions that the life and therefore the artistic expression of the people depends.

I hope that by the few remarks I have made, laying down the principles and detailing their application, I have emphasized
[p 528]
Miss Mason's root idea, that the study of geography must be connected with experience, that is to say, that for little children the teaching must be experimental, going from the concrete image to the abstract idea, thus paving the way for an intelligent grasp of international geography. This is gained in the higher classes by a wide reading of books of the first merit, written by those who have a thorough knowledge of their subject, and by a perfect understanding of the map.

By these means the child acquires a taste for geographical reading which never leaves him, and geography to his mind, instead of being a mere string of facts relating to this or that country will mean an abiding interest in the world around him.