

## GEOGRAPHY AS A MEANS OF CULTURE.

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As an instrument of education, geography has a three-fold value: a practical value, as affording information which every one wants; a disciplinary value as offering problems, and those of the most fascinating, for the exercise of the intellectual faculties; and a third value, as a means of culture. We have already listened to papers so full of interest, power and of valuable instruction, that little remains to be said either as to the educational value of geography, or as to the best way of teaching it. Therefore I shall confine my remarks to one aspect of geography, begging you to bear in mind that I am not looking at the subject in all its bearings, nor indicating methods of teaching it, any further than those incidental methods which will suggest themselves to the cultivated teacher whereby to make geography a *means of culture* to his pupils.

The enormous value I would attach to geography as a means of culture turns upon an educational doctrine which may strike you as heterodox. I believe we attach too much importance to the active labors of the mind, as compared with its receptive states. How, you say, is it not by exercise, judicious, well-regulated exercise, that the intellectual faculties grow and become vigorous? Not entirely so, the truth is, the mind, like the body, is greatly in need of exercise; it must have its own serious labors, even its own athletic sports; but, no more than the body, can the mind work without meat. If it is to be vigorous, it also must be well fed; and the receptive function [sic] of the mind is every bit as important to the educator [sic] as are its active labors. Reading maketh a full man, says Bacon; and reading is, commonly, little more than [sic] the act of receiving.

But what is the fitting meat for the mind?

Surely, the information which is the sum and substance of every lesson the boy gets in school? Not necessarily so; it would be an ease to all of us engaged in education if we could believe that set a boy to his lessons, and we necessarily set before him the fit sustenance for his mind. Let us suppose a boy of ten going through the work of a school-day. He does sums first—no meat for him there; he has a lesson about a part of speech, or declines a Latin noun—the second case offers no stay for his stomach. His history lesson? No, nothing for him there; he learns a list of the battles in the Wars of the Roses. But his geography lesson? He may find on a globe, and learn a list of the towns intersected by such a meridian, upon such a parallel, and go home at the end of a pretty laborious school-day on an empty stomach, having had no [p 172] more mental sustenance than his body would get did his mother set him down to a dinner of sawdust.

For, as a matter of fact, the mind has its appropriate and necessary food, just as truly as the body; and you may fill the mind without feeding it, never knowing what you are about; for people take too little heed of mind-hunger, and don't commonly understand the mental uneasiness of the earlier stages, and the atrophy that set in later.

As the body is fitly nourished upon organic food, in so far living that the processes of decay are hardly set up, so the mind, too, must have its living food—absolutely living—carrying on the the [sic] three great functions of life—feeding, growing, and producing after its kind. In a

word, *ideas* are the intellectual food; and the child who has received no one idea in a school-day has had nothing for his mind to live upon, however much his faculties have been kept on the alert. "*Idea*, the image or picture formed by the mind of anything external, whether sensible or spiritual"—such, with more on the same lines, is the definition of "idea" to be found in any dictionary; but if you recall the history of any one idea you have yourself received, you will perceive that such a definition falls below the truth. For instance—to take an illustration from the subject engaging us just now—you went to the late Colonial Exhibition, and were greatly struck, as a teacher, with some life-like model of an Indian village. "If I could take that home," you say, "to show my class, it would be worth a dozen lessons!" The idea sticks to you, you cannot get rid of it; you will make a model Indian village; yes, but why an Indian village only? Why not an Abyssinian, a Bulgarian, a Japanese village? From that moment you are beset by an idea, and you cannot take up a book or a newspaper that does not somehow bear on your idea. This is how great inventions are made, great books are written, great pictures are painted; an idea has taken possession of a man, and *grown* within him toward some great result. And it is not only the idea which grows; the mind of the man grows upon the idea he receives, as his body grows on his daily bread.

Now, when you consider that, give a boy a few dominant ideas and his self-education is provided for; and that ideas are as needful for the daily growth of the mind as bread is for that of the body, you see that it is the teacher's wisdom to set before his pupils a satisfying repast of ideas at least once or twice in the school day. How are we to know when we give an idea? The question calls for an answer too wide for the limits of this paper; but this is enough to go on with: We may know when we impart an idea by the open-eyed, open-mouthed eagerness with which children take it.

At last we get to geography. There is positively no subject so fer  
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tile [sic] in ideas as geography, properly taught; and, though secondary schools employ other instruments of *culture*—that is, roughly speaking, the sowing and the reaping of ideas—there is, I imagine, no other subject in the hands of the elementary teacher by which he can do so much to make the mind of the rude, untaught child "a mansion for all lovely forms."

To illustrate what I mean: A master wishes to teach a class the geography of Yorkshire, in such a way as to put into their hands a key to the understanding of all geography. If he could have the aid of a good relief map, to be laid before the children, his labors would be lightened; but, wanting that, he will make the best of what he has—blackboard, a wall-map, and a tray of wet sand, say, wherewith to fashion a rude model in the act of teaching. The *idea* he wishes to give the children is, that its rivers have *made* Yorkshire; it is not only that the busy manufacturing centres have gathered round the rivers, nor that in the valleys alone can men carry on profitable work, whether the labor of the loom or of the plough; it is, that the rivers have themselves (for the most part) scooped out the habitable places of the earth and prepared them for the uses of men by laying down the alluvial soil which they themselves have prepared. Here is one of the ways of nature; a key to much geography everywhere, and an idea to be received with avidity by every human being; for this is one sort of knowledge which we are made with a natural appetite for.

But how to convey such an idea, which is, you may say, above the level of the ordinary schoolboy. Let the master get a grip of the idea himself and, depend upon it, the children will

seize it, too. With the help of such illustrations as he has, or makes, he will show that the whole of Western Yorkshire is a vast mountain mass, a tableland, lifting its head so high that the air of the uplands is too cold for corn crops, or green crops, as the soil is too poor. The main features of the moors are probably very well known to the children—boulders, patches of heather, rank grass, bilberries, air delicious in the breathing. But they may not know that in many parts the moors are no better than soaking sponges, brimfull of water, covered with grass or ling on the surface, but unsafe to step upon. They offer little to look at, but yet are the moors to be had in honor, for here is the nursery of the prosperity of Yorkshire, the making-place of all its beauty. It is in these sponges that nearly all the rivers of Yorkshire gather their waters. Follow up the Wharfe, for instance, on map or model, to its head, and you will come to the wide spongy moor of Dodd Fell, green enough with coarse grass, but a mere soaking bog. Here are many slow, narrow runlets of clear brown water, each no bigger than a road-side gut-

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ter, and these unite to make the small beginning—here the Ribble, there of the Wharfe. You track one of these runlets back to it [sic] source—if you do not fear to sink in the bog—and all you see is the water oozing out of the spongy earth, which is too full to hold any more.

What next? So far the children have got the idea of one vast, high moor, the nursing mother of its waters, filling Western Yorkshire. Now this idea is to be modified; here are not one, but many moors, and they all shelve down into green glens shut in between mountain walls. This is how it is: The rivers which gather their waters on the moors work their way *down* towards the sea by cutting channels for themselves in the solid rock. The mountain limestone, of which much of Western Yorkshire consists, is of a yielding nature, readily worn away by the water; and many a leak has made, in the course of ages, a broad, deep valley, where are villages and homesteads, and, lower down, it may be, factories and towns; not that the rivers do the whole of the work—the running water begins to carve out a valley, and then frost and rain, ready laborers, are at hand to carry on the task.

Now, you add another idea to this last—which you have made clear by opening out valleys in your sand model. Now the children must get a notion of the *look* of this moorland country.

The children will follow when you tell them how there are so many rivers and creeks in this region that the moor is cut up in all directions by the lovely dales of West Riding. Sometimes the moor appears to be worn away into long ridges, dividing one river valley from another. And you may stand upon the edge of a moor, and look behind over a wide waste, while down at your feet is a green dale where you may see two or three villages amid the trees. Then you look across to the other side of the valley, beyond the ridge which shuts it in, and you see another ridge behind that, and another behind that, and another and another. Between each pair of ridges is a line of deep black shadow; that is all you see. But you know that if you get upon the hill above it, the black shadow opens out into a green dale with a stream, beside which are the villages where the fair-haired Yorkshire bairns dwell and go to school. This is the sort of thing to be seen from certain elevations in Craven, for instance, which include the upper valleys of the three sister rivers—the Aire, the Wharfe and the Ribble.

Now you wish the children to get a notion of the aspect of the true mountainous country to the northwest, where Yorkshire borders upon Westmoreland, and the long straight

fells rise into giant masses, oddly shaped, and over 2,000 feet in height, like Mickle Fell, Ingelboro', Pennyghent and Wherside.

Follow up the Ribble valley as far as Hortenin-Ribblesdale, and you

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appear to be at the foot of Pennyghent, though, near as the giant looks he is fully six miles off. Light, ragged clouds are scudding around the summit, which rises before you sharp and edge-like, and reaches the valley level by two or three huge noses. The sides are steep and grass grown except where they are scored with water courses, straight and of a reddish color. But, from this point, Pennyghent [sic] has not that look of a fortified castle which belongs to most of the limestone hills.

This sort of thing which the practical teacher will know how to word into his pupil, by question, illustration, rapid blackboard sketches—a suggestive line or two—will furnish the boy with ideas which are a valuable life endowment; and that in addition to the fact that the chambers of his imagination are being hung with pictures. The next time, or whenever he sees any of these things, he will be aware of what he sees, more to go about and see will become the purest delight of his life; books of travel will be full of absorbing interest for him; he will revel in pictures of landscape; and poetry, [sic] so far as it unfolds the vision of the seeing eye, will find in him the hearing ear.

Again, another class of ideas that every human being has a natural craving for, are those associated with events of the past of national interest. Every child is born to love history, but history as he learns it at school is not an enjoying study. There is so much to be done, and so little time to do it in that the history study is apt to be bald and meagre. Now, I venture to say, that the teaching of geography offers more opportunities to impart the *historic idea*—the vivid realization, that is, of the persons and events of the past—than does the study of history itself. The knowledge so picked up may be scrappy and disconnected, but, if it offer what Miss Yonge calls a “cameo of history;” the cameo is both pleasing and interesting in itself, and also it gives the child a hint of what history has for the student who is not content with skeleton outlines.

We have not half covered the ground—have not touched upon the wide fields of natural products and of human industries, for instance; but already we see geography introducing many interests to the child's mind—history, poetry, story, landscape, great physical evolutions—and all falling fairly within the old-fashioned and correct definition of geography, “a description of the earth's surface,” which properly includes the special interests belonging to the parts described. Now, when you come to consider that a man's standard of culture may be measured, broadly, by the number, variety and pleasantness of his intellectual resources, I think you will allow me to claim geography as a very efficient instrument of culture.

Two objections will, I dare say, occur to you. All this is very plea-

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sant in theory, you say; but how is a teacher to do this sort of thing, when it is not the geography of Yorkshire, but the geography of the World he has to teach. And, in the next place, examiners offer little encouragement to “ideas;” *facts* must be presented for examination; therefore, *facts* must be taught throughout the year, and there is no time for anything over. In answer to the first objection, let me say that the teacher *who has ideas* must needs impart them, and to do so takes no more extra time than it takes for the sun to shine. To keep ourselves in constant preparation for the teaching of geography, we must lay ourselves out to

get ideas; we must see all we can, take intelligent notes of what we see, and tell the children, or show them when possible what we ourselves have noticed. Again, reading maketh a full man; it is well to have in hand for private reading one or two of the best books of travel treating of the country or region we are at the time giving lessons upon. Then, when the teacher is overflowing with matter it is easy for him to throw in the graphic touch here and there that makes the geography lesson full of living interest for the child.

On the second count, the non-paying nature of ideas, there is something to be said also. It is a law of mind that facts will not lodge in the memory unless as you first drive in the appropriate idea for them to hang upon. Given the idea and it will bear as many facts as naturally depend upon it; but there is no other way of retaining facts than as they are associated with ideas. Therefore, ideas are not only profitable, but necessary furniture of the mind.

But facts, too, are necessary. Ideas have permanent value only as they are intimately associated with facts. And here we come to the part maps play in the study of geography.

Teach geography so that the movement of a pointer over the map is as the unrolling of a panorama before the eyes of the class, so that the children are able to describe the landscape, industries and associations of a given spot on a blank map, and you may let the map itself do the rest. Let the children study it to find answers to questions carefully framed to bring out an orderly statement of the geography of the district; what they thus see with their eyes and realize with their imagination, is not soon forgotten. Names thus become the signs of things signified, and are securely lodged in the memory. An intelligent mastery of the maps belonging to his studies will carry a candidate triumphantly through most examinations in geography.—  
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Behind, and above, and all round the real teacher, is the spirit of our new civilization.