

## THE TEACHING OF GEOGRAPHY

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Some of us still remember the dark ages in which we were brought up when all geographical teaching was a direct training of the memory of facts.

We were taught to repeat lists of capes and bays and then identify these on maps. We were taught lists of towns and their products and the rivers they stood upon, and even the number of their inhabitants; but it was indeed 'their's not to reason why'. Nobody asked us *why* Oxford stood where it did, or had been an army headquarters in the civil war, or had developed a *northern* suburb in modern days.

Some of us remember the first stirring of the dry bones—and how our founder gave the results of her personal walks and investigations of our own country to the world as *The Forty-two Shires*—of how the London University Lectures on the subject were given in the 'Eighties'—of how the Schools of Geography were founded, and largely through the inspiration of Dr. Douglas Freshfield, the 'Geographical Association' grew out of the Royal Geographical Society, and the path was ready for the mental explorer and discoverer to tread.

In these days we learn a great deal of geography from our own way of life, since we are a migratory race with friends and interests everywhere—a cousin in Ceylon, a daughter in Kenya, a son in the Middle East, a friend in Vancouver. We accept this far-flung Commonwealth and Empire entirely as a matter of course and tend to fill our houses with carvings and native curiosities, without, however, enquiring very much into their source and origin.

Moreover we all travel nowadays; for one man who made the 'grand tour' in 1831, thousands have made jaunts with the Wayfarer's or Lunn's or Cook's or any other modern form of the Magic Carpet.

'[sic]The 'school journey' movement has vast social benefits, and will probably do much for the ultimate peace of the world, but it is not always a complete geography lesson, because it must also be a holiday and an opportunity for much besides. Some incidental geographical teaching is given through the numerous adventure stories in foreign settings which

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are published to-day and the many exciting accounts of expeditions and voyages of discovery in remote parts of the world; the modern cinema, and television also, occasionally produce wonderfully instructive documentary films about places and people and the way of life in other countries.

Thus we are probably better informed and with less effort than our predecessors, but 'information' is not necessarily understanding geographia—'I write about this earth' as an attitude of life and mind. I can either feel:

'Great, wide, beautiful, wonderful world,  
With the wonderful water round you curled,  
And the wonderful grass upon your breast—  
World! you are beautifully dressed!'

or I can draw isobars and measure wind pressure, or solemnly compare the products of South Africa and Australia. In short, my own nature will give me my attitude towards this greatest world of synthesis.

And that is why geographers never agree with one another. One would have us strictly scientific, and map out the world in 'regions' and trace barometric causes and geological foundations. Another would have us study the life of man and his power to modify his environment and his own race in the doing of it. Another sees the growth of agriculture, social structure, the arts, the commerces and the histories, and can deduce them all from a 'site'. No 'ology' but touches somewhere and stimulates our desire to be graphic about this earth of ours:

*Anthropology.* The distribution of mankind and his adaptation to his surroundings.

*Astronomy.* Gives us the causation of our days and seasons.

*Astrology.* Made the Druids of old modify our hill tops, transport stones, build 'Maya' towers and possibly even the Zimbabwe.

*Botany.* Gives us the product in floral life of varying soils and climates.

*Biology.* Gives us the environmental adaptation of life to circumstances.

*Geology.* Gives us the root foundation of all contour, scenery, soils and fitness for man's habitation. All architecture as his use of the material to his hand. All mining as he turned natural ores to civilized uses.

*Ecology.* The adaptation of flora to soil and site, so that we learn to look, for instance, for beeches or bladder campions on limestone!

*Meteorology.* The climatic causes of the factors of life—monsoons in India—the Lancashire rainfall, etc.

And so on indefinitely, bringing together the work of endless experts and specialists in one common fundamental power to see truly and describe accurately and use the earth we must first love and then put to our service.

We, in the Parents' Union School, have a definite tradition of linking geography to all world knowledge—art, architecture, geology, astronomy, biology, botany and general world history, all of which combine to give our children the freedom of the earth they live upon, and their own proper relationships with it. But we, too, must have a technique and our reasons for that technique. First things must come first, and the natural wonder of the little child over day and night, times and seasons,

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is best met with such teaching on the subject as will arise out of his struggles with the 'clock' and the globe.

We *do* teach little people latitude and longitude, though this shocks some moderns, because we know that any map is meaningless to them until they have learnt its measure. In the same way they learn to 'measure' on a small scale themselves. But interest will always spread outwards from the known to the unknown. Moreover, childhood is the age of 'collections'—the home or school museum makes the reading of the 'children of the world' a *personal* experience, and visits to museums to see the Red Indians' robe or the South African ostrich egg have a thrill and meaning. Moreover, our work shows the *continuity* of man's use of this globe; ancient civilisations come home to us through the golden mouse of Ur or the flounced dame from Knossos, and then Trans-Jordania and Crete are not merely names on a map but homes of our links with the world before and around us; and so we

believe in outdoor practical exploration of their own immediate neighbourhood—‘jog-trots’, as the irreverent may term them! We learn by the puddles and ponds to understand rivers and oceans and by the smallest hills the soils and rocks and the crumpling of the strata into mountains.

It is possible, even in the midst of a city, to ‘walk the bounds’ of a parish, to trace old field paths as rights of way, to see the changing occupations by the churchyard tombstones and monuments if by no other means—in short, to do an immense amount of observation which forms the geographical habit of looking and enquiring.

The co-relation of geography and history is not an academic point, it is an essential reality of life; the Pennine gap, the Silurian gap, the Alpine passes have stories manifold, but these have their causes far back in climate, geology, race distribution and many other factors.

The ‘whole’ child becomes a ‘whole’ man interested in every side of life, and he is just as absorbed in the causes of American isolation of yore, in the changes of climates, in the discoveries of Christopher Columbus, in the extinction of the bison, in the wheat production of the Middle-West and in the new physical type evolving on the Californian sea board!

Our teaching aims at a science of forming such relationships. Suppose a stream runs at the foot of the child’s home garden—does he know:

(a) Its name, into what river it runs and where it rises and where the main stream reaches the sea?

(b) The rocks and soils through and over which it runs and which will account for the nature of its bed, its meanderings, and whether the water is ‘hard’ and if so, with what elements?

(c) The villages and towns on its banks, their nature, character, trades and *raison d’être*?

(d) Has he a personal relationship with its water-rats, caddis worms, water-boatmen, sticklebacks, and any and all of its natural inhabitants?

(e) Can he take the rain gauge and calculate how the garden feeds the flow?

All these things are geography and relationships with life and therefore the child’s right as well as his possible duty.

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Once this sort of relationship has been formed it is transferred anywhere; it is an attitude of mind which will accompany the child and the man through life, wander he where he will, and if we have been unable to give that natural thirst for ‘relationships’ its proper satisfaction we have not taught ‘geography’.

First-hand books of exploration and travel will fire the imagination and stimulate the will. This man dared the snows of the Poles, that man tracked the last fossil eggs of the monstrous bird—and the healthy natural child goes off to play at similar deeds of derring do, and grows up with a larger vision than journeying by the 9.15 tube!

By geography we train man to use his environment, and to be a reverent participator in the wonders of creation.

The ‘stay-at-homes’ are more interested in the life around them when they know the story behind their own breakfast table—the prairie wheat, the Danish egg, the New Zealand butter, the Oxford marmalade, the West Indian banana, the Ceylon tea or the Brazilian

coffee and the local Farmer Giles' milk—and to some comes the larger vision and the insistent call of

'Something lost beyond the ranges,  
Something waiting—*go and see!*'