

On Learning Geography.

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THERE is no doubt that the ideal way to learn Geography is to travel; so we discovered when we brought Seven-year-old and Five-year-old home to England from China, via Japan and Canada, and took them back again as Eight-year-old and Six-year-old, via Suez and Colombo. To be waked up from one's siesta to see Fujiyama, rising out of the mist like a dream-mountain claiming our worship before we knew it; to see nothing, literally nothing, but the waters of an ocean for the space of seventeen days; for a whole day to gaze upon the almost overwhelming grandeur of the Rockies; to see an iceberg in the Atlantic, surely this was the best way of learning about the wonderful world we live in.

Travelling back by the Suez route, Eight-year-old was advanced enough to appreciate the historical aspect of Geography. Gibraltar, Aden, Colombo, Singapore, as we touched them, told in a simple way some of the story of the British Empire; sailing down the west coast of Italy brought the Romans into his ken; the Eastern Mediterranean, the Greeks. From Port Said he was linked on to the Egyptians, and with them the ever new stories of Joseph and Moses, and by the end of the voyage such terms as desert, ocean, straits, port, needed no definition or explanation; they were, as it were, self-evident.

Once we settled down at home to serious lessons, however, it was not possible, of course, to continue learning in

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this vivid way. Perhaps one had become spoilt, but maps seemed so flat, literally as well as figuratively. Eight-year-old still loved to pore over them and show Six-year-old the way we had been all over the world. Interest there was still and sufficiently strong to ensure enjoyable lessons, but still something was missing.

Then it was that I discovered salt dough. I had been looking for something for use in hand-work for modelling. Plasticine not being locally obtainable, and Chinese clay, suitable in almost every other respect, too dirty. An American recipe for salt dough supplied my need. Salt dough is simply two tablespoons of salt and one of flour, blended together with one of water, put into a pan and heated over a fire till it is hot throughout, all the time being thoroughly broken up with a fork. When cold, it is ready and delightful to use being non-sticky, it keeps fresh indefinitely, can be painted any colour desired, and is easily made when required. Its one drawback is that it hardens rather quickly, but keeps moist if kept in a damp cloth, constantly renewed.

In our Geography reading, Holland was our starting point, and when I came in the "Ambleside Geography" to the description of the land "so low is it that the very rivers flow far above the level of the land" I was met by a volley of Hows? and Whys? from two eager little minds. How to deal with them adequately was the problem, when suddenly I bethought me of salt dough. There might lie the solution, as indeed it did.

That evening I made a trial map of Holland in salt dough, on a base of white cardboard, and as the minutes went by the fascination of making one's own maps in relief grew and grew. When the country lay flat and level, intersected by rivers of a higher level and canals of a lower level, both protected by dykes, with a stronger dyke wall round the sea coast, it needed only

the paintbox to colour the sea and rivers and canals in blue, the land in green, the dykes in brown, and to put here and there little painted dough windmills with paper arms attached to a bent pin, to give to the child mind a most adequate and unforgettable idea of Holland and its own characteristics.

Norway and Sweden were the next countries, and Eight-
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year-old made the relief map himself, with Six-year-old as a delighted manufacturer of mountains which were set lavishly up the west coast of Norway, the point of a hatpin making the indented coastline; above the snow line the tops were left white, their bases being coloured green.

Russia was just as delightful to make. The northern part was left white to represent the frozen plains—the middle belt was planted well with diminutive pine needles for the forest belt, while bird seed scattered broadcast over the south suggested the wealth of the grain harvest of Southern Russia.

Asia was difficult to make entirely of dough, so I drew a large map on white cardboard and we made the tablelands and mountain ranges only with the dough. It is not difficult to remember Hindo Koosh, Kuen Lun and other strange names of the East when one has made the mountain one's self and then pinned on a printed label as a flag of recognition. The difficulty of the Yang-tse-kiang in managing all the mountain gorges it encountered was quite apparent, in contrast to the lazy Ganges flowing leisurely in a straightforward blue line through the green plains of Bengal.

These maps we are keeping, and now our days of travel are over, for the present, we have discovered that the best way to learn Geography is from maps and best of all from maps we have made ourselves.