5. The Teaching of Geography.

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Of all the subjects included within the terms' programmes, Geography has probably been subjected to the most criticism, and has presented problems, both in teaching and in the term's divisions for each Form, which have not found ready solutions.

The arrangement of the work for each term is physical, and offers less difficulty in solution.

The teaching of the subject is not so easy of disposal. It includes the methods of presentation, and with method the skill and personality of the Teacher are inseparably connected.

There is, too, the question of whether the "Ambleside" Series of Readers is a suitable one, within the limits of the organisation and conditions of an elementary school.

The second and third points may be deferred. We can come back to them after we have addressed ourselves to the amount of study in the subject set per term.

In arriving at the conclusions I offer you on the first point, let me say from what data I draw them. I have analysed the work for six consecutive terms, that is, from Sept. 1918–July 1920. The September beginning is convenient, because in the majority of schools, the subjects year, as distinct from the register year, begins after the Midsummer Holidays.

The work of Form IB. offers no difficulty. The real objections begin at Form IA, which commences the orderly study of Geography from Book 1. The contents of this book are so portioned that two years are taken to cover it. The divisions for each term are natural divisions, to which reasonable objection cannot be made. I would like to say here that a child, beginning its geographical survey of the world, would feel no surprise at whatever point its journey commenced. The study of Geography is the study of incontrovertible facts—of things and conditions which man, on the whole, has little power to alter. He has to adapt himself to existing conditions oftener than he can alter

[p 580]

the conditions to suit himself. Mathematics and science may be taught to a greater degree by experimental inquiry than Geography, within the limits of time and opportunity as they prevail in school education.

The equation of a graph may be discovered by the Hindoo boy from the same data and by the same method as by the English boy. But the physical environment of each is conditioned by a set of wholly different circumstances, and each must accept (within the limits previously given) a statement of the physical environment of the other, as fact.

To get back to the divisions. Assuming a child to spend one year in Form IA, it covers, roughly half the book. Naturally, one expects the study of Book 1 to be completed in the next Form, IIB. But this is not done, and may be an oversight on the part of those who draw up the syllabus. Whether it is an oversight or not, the objections may be met by allowing the reading of the book to be completed in the succeeding three terms spent by the scholar in Form IIB. He will thus make acquaintance with the elementary facts on which an intelligent study of Geography is based.

The suggestion of continuing study of Book 1 in Form IIB. has a parallel.

Contemporaneous with the use of Book 1, the scholar is reading the first 77 pages from Book 2, in Form IA. This amount is prescribed every year, the scholar continuing work from Book 2 in Form IIB. If the last suggestion be adopted it may be advisable to commence each September in Form IA. and read through the year to the 66th page.

An alternative suggestion is to cover Book 1 within the year and leave Book 2 for Form IIB. Personally, I prefer the former suggestion of using Books 1 and 2 simultaneously.

It would also appear advisable for Form IA. to begin its reading from Book 2 at the beginning and not at p. 50, the last chapter of the description of the "Seagull's" cruise round Great Britain. This amendment would secure continuity of treatment in Form IIB.

The work set for Form IIB. does not present much difficulty. The analysis of the programmes shows that this form covers 2 Books in five terms. Bearing in mind that the aim of the year's work is to give a scholar a knowledge of the world divisions in general outline only, it may seem possible that the five terms' work could be done in three terms, by the following arrangement:

[p 581]

1st term—Complete the study of Europe.

2nd term—Asia.

3rd term—Africa, America, and Australia.

But it must be clearly seen that the portions of the reading chosen for the narrative tests must be those bearing on the essential features of each country under treatment. I shall have something more to say on this later on.

I come to the Geography of Form IIA, where defects and deficiencies seem to be most apparent. An analysis of the programmes shows that 34 counties out of the 40 are studied in two years—13 in the year 1918–1919, and 21 in the following year.

Now, if it is conceived that Miss Mason intends the geography of England to be studied in mosaic fashion, county by county, then criticism may be justified. As you see, at the end of two years a scholar would have laid 34 tiles, and his floor would be incomplete. His view of England, as a whole, might be as distorted as the impression one sometimes gets in sitting down and contemplating a tiled floor.

But Miss Mason intends no such thing. Ought we not to read the prefaces to the 'Ambleside' Readers? A careful study reveals other methods and aims. Reading and subsequent narration are not to constitute the one and only means of approaching the subject. The oral lesson has its place.

In Book 3 she says: "The general outlines of the geography of England are, it is supposed, already known by the class, as this is a subject better adapted for oral teaching than for a class book."

Every teacher knows the essentials which these "general outlines" should include; and the 'Reader' used in conjunction, will assist the oral teaching. The result will be a scheme of Geography as full as should reasonably be expected.

In any term, the study of the set counties will provide material which will set the foundations for some aspect which the teacher has under exposition. If, as in September, 1918, the scholar is reading up the Chalk Counties, then the study of other agricultural areas is helped by contrast and comparison, and he is better prepared to follow the oral teaching. In the following term the counties include agricultural, mining, and industrial regions.

If this view of the relation between the work of the teacher with the class, and the individual work by the scholar, is
[p 582]
accepted, then the amount of work, as set in each programme, is sufficient. We must remember that in Form IIA. a scholar is making use of his power of reading for the purpose of directed study. The amount of work set is sufficient to provide opportunities for the teacher to test the result of reading by written or oral narration and by questions on the map.

But the quicker children, who are commonly better readers, need not be restricted in their private reading, either at home or during the reading lessons (when geographical interest is present) to the set pages. Encouragement in that direction is both good for the individual scholar and the rest of the class, and helpful to the teacher.

Miss Mason, in a letter to me, has something very interesting to say on the reading from Book 3. She writes: "It is good for a boy to get pretty intimate with, say, a dozen of the counties of England. His younger brother, or next door neighbour, may learn another dozen, and so knowledge spreads." Is this not a natural method? Is it not the spirit in which this Conference was convened? Why not recognise and use it in our teaching then?

When I keep in mind the amount of information a scholar can get from his map, which may be pieced together and made intelligible by the teacher, and when the educational training afforded by the study of the set portions is given its value, then I do not see that the syllabus for Form IIA. calls for drastic revision.

Whatever objections may be raised against the 'county' study of England, one view in its favour may be given. We do not think of England or any other country, in the mass. The man who, away from the homeland, thinks of England, recalls the place about which his most intimate thoughts are entwined. There is his 'England.' The 'Reader' does give to each county its individuality.

The observations I have made on the work of Form IIA. apply also to that of Form III. Two years are taken to cover the study from the Book 4. Map study and oral lessons must be employed to supplement and amplify the work of the scholar on the pages set.

There is one thought I should like to interject. Has it struck many who are working to P.N.E.U. programmes that the principle of classification might be re-adjusted? Put simply, I mean this. When Form IIA. is reached, has it
[p 583]
been felt that the idea of "pushing" the average scholar may not be wise, bearing in mind the fuller curricula and higher standards in Forms III. and IV.

If it is desired to include the whole of Europe, or the essentially important divisions of it, within the work of a year, then this end may be secured without interfering with the portions of Book 4 set in each programme by supplementing the private reading of the scholar.

Thus in the year 1918–1919, the scholar reads up the Geography of the following countries:

Sept.–Dec., 1918: Belgium, Holland, Spain, Portugal.

Jan.–March, 1919: Switzerland and Italy. (In this term he also revises some of facts of Physical Geography).

April–July: German Empire and Austrian Empire.

The supplementary work of the class with the Teacher might consist of the examination

of the map of Europe in order to discover its relief and build—the political divisons [sic]—(the 'Big Three' could not give an authoritative lesson on this subject at the present day)—and the general treatment of those countries not included within the three programmes [sic]

By doing this, we produce a syllabus comprehending a study of Europe. The amount of detail will depend upon two conditions—the amount of time which can be given to Geography, and fitness of the staff to give restricted or extended attention to the subject. Some, with a personal fondness for the subject developed by special training, will give more time to Geography. But we must not be swept away by eloquent demonstrations of the super-importance of Geography. It is, after all, only one of the educative subjects. Its ultimate value in a scheme of general education is a matter of opinion.

For a quarter of a century I have seen attempts on succeeding generations of children to teach them the Geography of the World in a limit of seven years. Think a little on three things—The World—A Child—Seven Years. The principal result of your communing will be one of thankfulness that a wise Providence has endowed the child-mind with such a wonderful power of resilience.

Form IV. syllabus, taken as suggested for the other Forms, and in a corresponding spirit, will become equally manageable. More so, because it is possible to treat it more liberally and at a slower rate, for the average child spends over a year in Form IV. Even if it does not, then something of interest in the world is
[p 584]
left for it, and Miss Mason's methods, properly applied, have given it the power to satisfy its interest.

THE AMBLESIDE READERS.

One result of the Great War has been to render existing text books and atlases out of date. The divisions of the earth's surface, politically at any rate, have to be marked off anew. What the exact result on a 1914 map of the world will be is not known.

Taking the series of five books, the number of mis-statements or inaccuracies is small. The books, however, are in process of revision, and the next edition will bring them up to date.

The main criticism comes from those disciples of the 'new' geography school, those who rank Geography with Mathematics and Science as a subject to be taught almost wholly by deductive and inductive processes of thought.

Research by geographers has certainly resulted in a quasi-scientific presentation of the subject being possible. But it seems to me that such a presentation is more suitable to a riper age than that of the primary school.

Children do find the picturesque or literary method of treatment interesting, and that element of interest is just what we try to introduce in the teaching of every subject.

Personally (and I say this without intention of disrespect to those teachers of "scientific" Geography who may be present) I have a suspicion that the interest in the scientific presentation is present really in the teacher. By a piece of thought projecttion it is found in the child.

However, the question of superiority is not to be settled in this Conference. The teacher who wishes to teach a few geographical laws will find sufficient material in the 'Readers' from

which to draw deductions and build up the general laws. If he has designed a set of original exercises (vide 'Suggestions'), by all means let him find the time and opportunity to set them. Such exercises in no way run counter to the Programmes.

The geographical handbooks, in matter and volume compared with the Ambleside Books, come out unfavourably. The latter are full. Some say too full. But it is an easier matter to omit than insert in using them.

If the illustrations do not command approbation, either as to their nature or quantity, we must not forget that we cannot

[p 585]

have copious illustrations and full text. Abundant illustrations are to hand from various sources—guide books, picture postcards, emigration literature, illustrated periodicals; and where the need of them is felt, they may be readily obtained.

The series of Readers carries out the intention of Miss Mason, which is to give "to the map of a given country or district the brilliancy of colour and the wealth of detail which a panorama might afford, together with a sense of proportion, and a knowledge of general principles."

METHODS.

In our school we have, as in each other school represented here, and as with St. Paul: "Diversities of gift, but the same spirit." Teaching methods have a knack of exposing these "diversities of gift."

What method would seem best adapted to interpret Geography to the child? We may have private views, like the boy about his spelling. But let us see what Miss Mason has to say.

In Book 1 (the preface): "Geography should be learned chiefly from maps." Book 5: "If the class or the pupils work out the map questions on a given chapter by themselves, so that they are able to answer them from memory, the reading of the chapter afterwards will be intelligent and informing."

In the Books between 1 and 5 she consistently stresses this map work, which is as necessary before an oral lesson as before silent reading.

The effect of abundant map study is obvious. In answering questions without the open atlas a scholar must rely on his powers of visualising a particular map, a very important acquirement.

The intelligent study of war operations in different theatres throughout the world brought home to us adults our deficiencies in this power, and incidentally gave the training 'Ambleside' methods aim at giving the child.

Next comes the reading (silent) by the scholar, with his atlas before him. If the lesson is oral, then a wall atlas may be used in conjunction with that of the scholar's.

Narration follows. The extent to which oral narration should be used constitutes a difficulty. The answer to that difficulty is contained in the answer to the question which the teacher asks himself: "What is the really important piece of information in this chapter or chapters?" He has read the

[p 586]

book himself in preparing the lesson, and knows the answer. It seems to me that only from the

important paragraphs should class narration be expected. The scholar will glean other ideas in his reading, and in the discussion which follows narration, different scholars will reproduce those ideas which have made personal appeal. In permitting and encouraging this apparent aimless reproduction, the individual scholar is being assured of his own reading and is teaching his fellow scholars. The teacher adds or corrects, and at the end sums up.

If we fully realize that much of the matter in the Readers may be safely left to the child to deal with according to his taste, then the number of pages therein will shrink within the limits capable of being taken by scholar and teacher.

But if we expect narration in the form of mere memorized reproduction, in set order, of the pages read, then we must be prepared for little interest and less progress.

There is one more danger to which I would like to refer. We ought to recognise that the scholar is preparing from the book the matter which contains our otherwise oral lesson. If, in addition, we try to impose the matter of an oral lesson on the contents of the 'Reader,' we run the risk of committing what is a grave mistake in teaching, viz., overloading. We must not obscure what the scholar has self-acquired. We must be careful of interposing ourselves between the scholar and his book.

Narration does not rule out oral questioning. If we wish to elicit a simple fact, then the specific question has its turn, and is mainly employed in map work.