

Ancient Geography in Modern Education.<sup>1</sup>

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IT is the claim for geography that it co-ordinates regionally the results and conclusions of other sciences in respect to the natural phenomena of each and every region, and that, including, as it must, man's activities among the factors with which it is concerned, it stands in a peculiarly intimate relation with history, that brings it under the special notice of the art and applied science of education, but at the same time has made it so difficult in practice to assign to geographers their proper place and function in educational schemes. It is clearly urgent that those who have views as to what geographical training the 'new stage in education' shall offer should express them without delay.

## THE PLACE OF GEOGRAPHY AMONG ASPECTS OF LEARNING.

Geography, as its name indicates, is the systematic description of this earth of ours. But description is not an end in itself. The end, to which it is the means, is a science of the earth, an understanding and interpretation of its meaning. The geographer ascertains, records, compares, and interprets distributions, the arrangement of things on or in relation to the surface of the earth. Geography, that is to say, asks two questions in respect of each geographical fact: *Where* is it observed? And *why just there?*

Obviously, in this general sense, geography is the coequal sister-science of history, which studies and interprets the relations of events in time. But whereas the geographer's observations are for the most part verifiable at will—for he can go back to a place and see it again—the historian is always to this extent behind the times, that he can never catch up historical events at all, still less can he have them repeated. History is always looking for something that is no longer there; geography has the earth ever present, in all its 'young significance.'

Every relation between objects in space is, however, bound up with a relation between events in time. Consequently every geographical fact has its historical aspect, and every historical fact its geographical aspect. What we group together as the 'historical' sciences are inevitably also 'distributional' sciences, because all the facts and events which they study happen *somewhere* as well as *somewhen*.

All human history, then, is regional history, and loses value and meaning when its geographical aspect is overlooked. All geography, on the other hand, and (most obviously) all human geography, depends for its significance on the consideration that it is contemplating, not facts only, but events with causes and effects; processes, of which our map-distributions are momentary cross-sections.

Other aspects of science, the physical sciences, are concerned neither with relations in space nor with relations in time, but ultimately and sometimes

quite obviously with quantities and qualities. In respect to all those expressions of *how* things happen, or *how* they are composed, the historical and distributional sciences stand in the relation of applied sciences to the 'pure sciences' of physics, chemistry, and physiology: accepting and employing their conceptions and interpretations, like their vocabulary and notation.

Similarly, those aspects of science which are concerned with the estimation and interpretation of values—with relations, that is, as irreducible to quantitative expression as they are to conjunctions of region or period—have nevertheless ultimately this point of contact with geographical and historical science, that all the values with which they are concerned are values-to-man, and consequently are, as phenomena, characteristic of—perhaps even peculiar to—terrestrial life, and to a relatively recent phase of it.

Now of these three main groups of studies, the human sciences and the natural sciences, in the stricter sense, are alike systematic and consequently collateral studies, only touching each other at their margins. The remaining group, on the other hand, both in its historical and in its distributional aspect, derives its content and its data from any or all of the systematic sciences. There is a historical aspect of botanical study, for example, the palæobotany of fossil plants, linked with the field botany and plant physiology of to-day by survivals of archaic forms of plant life; and there is a geographical aspect, the study of plant distributions, with its intimate bearing on questions of descent and affinity, and its corollary, ecology, which I take to be the special study of co-distributions. Similarly, there is a historical aspect of ethics, and aesthetics, and no less a geographical aspect, brought latterly to some notoriety by current controversies about the 'diffusion' of ideas, as well as of techniques, the latter being but the expression of ideas in the solid, in artefact instead of behaviour.

Throughout these distributional aspects and treatments of the data of systematic sciences, both historical and regional considerations are ever present, ubiquitous, inextricable from each other. At most we may recognise by an obvious paradox that the geographer is concerned with distributions which are relatively stable in point of time—land forms, vegetation types, lines of communication—and the historian with sequences which are relatively stable regionally—the doings of this or that body of people more or less permanently sedentary within a particular complex of geographical conditions. But it follows from this that in the same way as the geographer fails of his duty if he overlooks the fact that, from mountains and the tides to town-planning and aviation, he is in fact dealing with distributions which are changing, though their rates of change vary almost infinitely, so the historian fails to appreciate the significance of historical events if he ignores those historically

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permanent limitations within which all human revolutions occur, and to which the most stable human institutions owe nearly all their stability.

#### HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL INSTANCES.

We boast, and rightly, that we try to make education practical and useful; that it is a means to an end; and that its end is the establishment of successors to ourselves at least as intelligent, efficient, responsible—*free*, in the old Greek sense of freedom (*eleutheria*) as ‘grown-up-ness’—as we are ourselves; and, as we severally hope, a great deal more intelligent, efficient, responsible, and free than most of our own fellow-citizens.

In the first place, then, we train the citizen-to-be in citizenship, which I take to be the modern technical term for what a Roman called *civilitas*. As, however, custom is of necessity both regional and temporal, it is to historical and geographical considerations that we recur when we are challenged to explain our own code, or to excuse those inconsistencies in it which are naturally more obvious to novices and newcomers from the ‘next generation’ than to old-stagers and ‘men of the world’ like ourselves. For these purposes we have recourse to records and traditions, reinforcing or mitigating precept by historical illustration; appealing from abstract to concrete, from morality to hero-worship.

Secondly, we have to present analytically the principal factors in the processes which make up the pageant of external Nature and the methods by which they are detected, measured, controlled, and applied to human ends. Here questions of distribution cannot arise. But from the moment when pure science passes over into any kind of practical application, considerations of place and time reappear; for in wild Nature all processes and all material resources are regional; and it is fundamental in human interference with the order of Nature that it displaces things and disarranges that order. At every stage, and more insistently and obviously in each higher stage, we are called upon to ‘think geographically’; and most of all when we come to the consideration of man’s dealings with his finest tool and worst obstacle, his fellow-man.

Thirdly, then, it is our business to train inborn faculties of observation and inference to make their own analysis of actual regional circumstances, of the given portion of the earth’s surface to which the citizen-to-be has access now; and maybe he will never have the chance to deal with any other. Modern geography accordingly adopts increasingly, and almost inevitably, this regional method of study and exposition as being at the same time the most efficient and the most economical in point of time.

#### ANCIENT GEOGRAPHY OF THE HOMELAND.

Yet even at that elementary stage in which the common aim of all concurrent ‘courses’ of instruction is to make the child familiar with the leading features of the ‘homeland,’ historical retrospect comes to play a part of ever-increasing importance; if only because in our time those very features are being profoundly modified. Artificial and for the most part urban or suburban conditions are rapidly

encroaching on what was recently rural. Yet what we call ‘unspoiled countryside’ in most parts of this island is itself in great measure artificial. Fortunately, in our timbered hedgerows, at all events, the principal elements of that ancient regime remain accessible to many of us. Characteristic data, that is, are still available for the reconstruction of that ‘unspoiled countryside’ for each principal period of national history, without which familiar episodes lose much of their historic value, because they are bereft of their geographical setting.

It would, however, be a very imperfect preparation for citizenship which included the history of British people only. Great as our national literature is, it owes much of its greatness and originality to the fact that it has been so apt to learn; that it has taken into its own texture so much of the best from other great literatures, from Israel, from Greece and Rome. If we would see life truly we must needs see it whole.

#### ANCIENT GEOGRAPHY IN CLASSICAL STUDIES.

Now it happens that these two cultures, each with its characteristic ideal of what man’s life may come to be, represent supreme achievements of humanity within natural regions and regimes strongly contrasted both with each other and with those of the British homeland. Greek life and all its legacy to us are man’s solution of the problem not merely of maintaining life under Mediterranean conditions, but also of realising to the full what life under those conditions might become. Conversely, as our knowledge of the later symptoms of decline and disorganisation grows, as we see it pictured in Rostovtseff’s “Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire,” the fact of a general hardening of the physical conditions—for which there appears to be sufficient evidence, and full corroboration from the course of events in North-Western Europe—goes far to explain the perplexing way in which well-considered remedies failed of their effect, and sometimes even aggravated that ‘distress of nations with perplexity’ which was imminent already in the last century of the Roman Republic.

This environment, however, happens to be one which illustrates with exceptional facility that interaction of geographical factors which makes all natural regions what they are. Partly no doubt for that reason, but mainly on account of the special interest and importance of its human geography, the Mediterranean region has been long and carefully studied; and is, I think, recognised by many teachers of geography as one of the most valuable for analytical study. There is therefore good reason to urge that at whatever stage the history of the ‘classical’ civilisation is included in the programme of education, the regional geography of the Mediterranean basin should be its customary counterpart, and that the two courses should be carried on with habitual cross-reference to each other. Conversely, when the proper moment comes for the study of the Mediterranean basin geographically, the history course should be planned so as to supplement it in respect of the more significant achievements of Mediterranean peoples.

ANCIENT GEOGRAPHY IN SIMPLE BIBLE  
TEACHING.

For the earlier periods of history, and for that other great factor of our own civilisation which is our inheritance from the Ancient East, the difficulties of correlation, which at first sight might appear greater, are in fact insignificant. For here we have ready to hand a great text-book already in compulsory use; at the same time great literature and great history; a great classic of Oriental life and its surroundings, and a masterpiece of English prose; the historical books of the Hebrew people, in our own Authorised Version. With this example before us of what is not only practicable but also prescribed irresistibly by public opinion as a fundamental element in public education, can anyone fairly say either that ancient geography is without direct utilitarian value in modern life, or that there is no room for it in the curriculum?

We all know very well that the Old Testament is sometimes taught more as if it were a collection of parables or allegories than as geography, or history, or even literature; but I venture to suggest that it is in proportion as we teach it as geography, as well as history and literature, that its value as parable or allegory will be most surely appreciated, and its contents will take their proper place, not as legends of an unearthly wonderland, but as contemporary record of a peculiar people, confronted, in a region no less remarkable, with the most momentous crisis that can befall any people, at a crucial period in the growth of the civilisation which is our own.

In Hebrew literature we have what is almost wholly missing in the Greek instance, an autobiography of an immigrant people during the whole momentous process of acclimatisation to regional conditions strongly contrasted with those out of which the newcomers came. Confronted with such novelties and such temptations to 'enter in and possess,' how were such people to behave?

That is one aspect of Hebrew history and geography, its domestic aspect, as an internal reconciliation of folk with place. The other aspect is external: the reaction of acclimatised Israel to the forces which were shaping the world-history of its times. From no single point of view is it more illuminating to survey and take stock of the great civilisations of the Nearer East than from the miniature States which centred in Jerusalem and Samaria; and the fateful separation of these from each other is itself an early symptom of the distractions which those giant neighbours caused.

Here, too, as in the Mediterranean lands, there is the less need to give illustrations in detail, since the last twenty years have completely remodelled our equipment for handling these regions and periods in every degree of elementary and more advanced treatment. It is no longer honest to plead ignorance of German as an excuse for shirking a public duty. Further, since our own country has incurred the obligations of its mandates for Babylonia and Palestine, in addition to its responsibility for the security and well-being of Egypt, we cannot plead that the geography of these regions lies outside the

scope of political duty, or the daily needs of every one of us. We may not want to understand those countries or their peoples; but as things stand we neglect those studies at our peril: and, at least, let us provide for our children.

PRESENT DISCONTENTS.

I am well aware that the correlation which I have proposed will be regarded as something of a revolution in the teaching of 'classical subjects,' and also that there are historical reasons for the methods actually employed. To judge from experience both of examinations in history and in geography, and of informal conference with teachers and taught, what passes for 'historical geography' is still one of the weaker aspects of the geographical course, while what has been described as 'geographical history' is scarcely attempted at all.

In discussions of elementary training we hear a good deal of the co-ordination of brain, eye, and hand. Why is it that as we ascend our educational ladder this primary necessity seems to be progressively ignored in the study of the humanities? With every allowance for the disciplinary value of games, such lack of manual dexterity as I have described is a serious defect of scholarly equipment. It is only not realised as such, because the chief employers of the 'finished' output of the humanistic courses in our universities are still themselves so inexperienced in graphic methods that many of them would have some difficulty in understanding a fully illustrated report on any regional topic.

In every other aspect of learning and advanced study, competent use of its special symbols and notation is an elementary prerequisite. But it is amazing how ill-equipped are most students of literary or historical subjects when it is a question of describing anything otherwise than in grammatical long-hand. It is not merely that they are poor draughtsmen; it is rather that they do not do their thinking about regional matters in such fashion that geographical symbols can express it. Yet, considered merely as a test of those qualities of co-ordinated craftsmanship, accurate observation, and clear concise statement of relevant facts, map-making ranks high. A finished map is a scientific document, but it is also a work of art; to its scientific value, its completeness and accuracy, it adds the value which is given by style. What is true of a map, the geographical document in its simplest and most purely geographical form, is just as true of other geographical work, which is all a more or less explicit commentary on maps, in literary form, or hints for the comparison of maps with one another.

It is in those compartments of our educational system where ancient history holds the most honoured and responsible place, that indifference to geographical considerations has lasted longest and most generally. So long as a numerous and influential class of public servants and legislators is recruited from those compartments, so long will the geographical aspect of historical study continue to be overlooked, merely because the responsible people have had little or no personal experience of it.