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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TEACHING GEOGRAPHY

[Readers of "Geography and the Higher Citizenship" in THE VIRGINIA TEACHER for March will recall that it set forth two tasks of this study: "To teach the facts of geography, and to encourage an attitude of mind."]

IF THIS attitude of mind is to contribute to a better understanding between peoples, both its content and its method of presentation are of the utmost importance. Let us define geography as the study of relationships between the earth and the life that dwells upon it. As we begin to ponder on this definition we at once see that it is necessary to know both the earth and the life upon the earth. The subject is so vast that the moment we begin to think about it we feel the need of subdivisions. The earth part falls easily into the three grand divisions of earth, water, and air.

The life part suggests such subdivisions as plants and animals, and among the animals we want to single out man for special treatment—human geography (anthropogeography).

In human geography we at once see economic geography, physical geography, political geography, and many other types of geography looming up as still further subdivisions.

If we think of political geography for a moment, we shall see that we need some history in order to understand it. Geography is indeed a wide-reaching subject. Of all subjects in the curriculum it especially needs to be well organized on good principles of pedagogy. Lacking these, it has been in times past a chaos of facts which could be acquired only by dreaded memory exercises.

This article attempts to emphasize two major improvements that have been made in methods of presenting geography so that better results may follow a given amount of effort. These two improvements in teaching are (1) the use of the psychological method of arrangement rather than the logical, and (2) the concrete method of teaching the principles of geography.

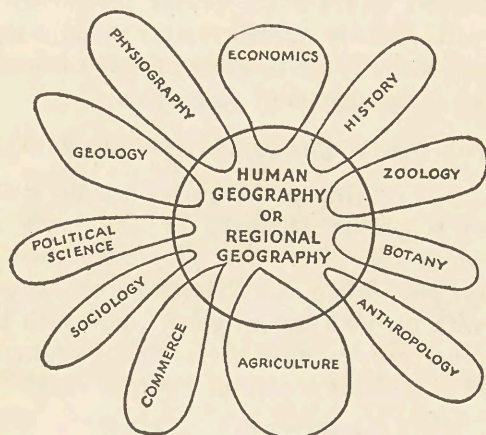
THE WIDE RANGE OF GEOGRAPHIC MATERIAL

The geography of the schools is the study of people as influenced by the lands in which they live. The geography class is the place where our children get acquainted with us, with our neighbors, and with the other peoples upon the earth. Geography thus becomes a task of interpretation.

Here is a people in a certain place. What influence does this place have on these people? Before we can answer that question we must know many things about the kind of place it is. Is the land surface hilly or level? Is its altitude high or low, its soil sand or loam or clay; deep or shallow; stony or smooth, rich or poor? Is the weather hot or cold, changeable or constant? What about the rain? Is there much, making the soil too wet for agriculture, or is there too little, making a desert which requires irrigation, or is the amount of moisture just right for farming or for grazing? When does this rain fall—in winter, summer, or all the year? Is the amount dependable or are there droughts? Is it a land of forests or of grassland? What crops can grow? Does it have water power or coal, oil, or other minerals? Are there manufactures? Is there much trade? This list of geographic factors or elements might be extended, and each of them will be found

at times to be a factor controlling man in some particular place.

It is plain that the geographer explaining men in a place needs to use some of the facts from many other subjects and sciences. Because of this fact some persons have at times claimed that geography was not a real subject at all. This fact of relationship and also the fact that geography has territory of its own is perhaps best shown if we examine the accompanying diagram.¹



The geographer explaining the relationships between men and their environment takes contributions from many sciences *but he takes the whole of no science*. House building is not a branch of mathematics because the architect and the builder happen to use some arithmetic and geometry in making house plans.

The work of the geographer may be likened to that of a builder who uses lime, sand, cement, stone, brick, boards, shingles, glass, paper, pipe, nails, wire, and other things, but the house he builds is not exclusively any one of these many things. It is of itself an entity, though many diverse

materials have been used to make it. Similarly, the geographer builds his own independent structure, using the materials from many subjects and sciences.

Since geography takes contributions from so many other subjects and sciences, it is plain that to some extent at least these subjects and sciences must be understood by the teacher and by the student before use can be made of them. This means that something of all these subjects must be taught. How shall this be done? There are two ways—the logical and the psychological.

A. The Logical. This is a systematic method, the German method. Realizing the necessity of all these things, the logical method deliberately starts out to teach all the elements first and upon this complete systematic and logical foundation it proceeds to rear the completed structure of geography.

If I were the dictator of an amply financed graduate school for the training of professional geographers and if I had students with insufficient courage to stand for it, I would use the logical method for post-graduate instruction. That, indeed, is the way a medical school works out the problem. Foundations in anatomy, physiology, chemistry, and other subjects are systematically laid as a beginning. The practice of medicine comes later. By this plan the systematically instructed student of geography would begin with climatology, oceanography, plant geography, animal geography, anthropology, history, economics, statistics (that he might be able to use his material). After this preparation he would be ready for economic geography, regional geography, political geography and the solution of special problems of a geographic nature. I believe this system to be highly desirable for the mature minds of the graduate school. Unfortunately, no American university has yet gone very far to attain so thorough a program.

¹For discussion of this type of diagram in relation to the subject of geography see Presidential Address of Professor Nevin M. Fenneman, University of Cincinnati, before the Association of American Geographers, *Annals of the Association*, 1919. See also, "Inheriting this Earth," O. D. Von Englen.

Meantime the authors of geographies have been making college texts and high school texts on that logical plan for the last thirty years. Many of these books have been in three parts, the first and second parts dealing with general principles and introductory material and the third part with their application in regional geography. A classic example of this is the monumental book, "Handbook of Commercial Geography," by my dear friend Chisholm. This much-copied book is now in its 9th excellent edition, and still its author closely follows the original German model by Scherzer.

The logical method tries to use the mind as a cold storage plant, but unfortunately it cannot lock the material in, and therefore many of the facts, because they are unrelated, have been forgotten by the time they are needed. The logical method must depend primarily upon sheer memory work—bald, unaided memory, like the multiplication table, or like that other agony, the declination of a foreign verb.

The general ideas which are taught in the preliminary sciences must be made to function or they are worthless. To function they must be related to something when they are first presented—not stuck into the mind to wait months for the day of use. This is the secret of the success of the psychological as compared to the logical method of teaching the principles of geography.

B. *The Psychological Method* might also be called the applied-science method. Instead of teaching general principles as introductory material to be on hand when wanted, it teaches the principles *in connection with some particular part of the earth or with some human activity which needs to be explained as a part of the general work of the book*. This explanation takes advantage of the principle of association, the secret of easy memory. Once this norm or principle or type is thoroughly established in the child's mind it can be used over and over again in explaining new but sim-

ilar situations. This is effective teaching, passing from the known to the unknown.

This psychological method has been used for nearly a decade in the most widely used college and high school geography texts in America. If it has succeeded in these age groups, there is certainly no reason why it is not the most desirable method for the elementary geography.

In addition to the above mentioned advantage of greater effectiveness of method, there is yet another gain. Time is saved. Instead of teaching a thing ineffectively twice, there is time for one thorough presentation and for frequent effective reviews through comparison.

The concrete method of teaching abstract principles

The applied-science or psychological method combines admirably with the concrete method of teaching principles and abstract ideas.

The use of the concrete, the story, or the parable in elementary geography is practical because it takes advantage of the way the human mind, especially the child's mind, works. An abstract idea is usually nothing at all in our mind until we can give it specific form. Therefore, the way to get the abstract idea into the mind is to get it there in the concrete form first—the story to prove a point.

The Curtis Publishing Company has made use of this piece of psychology in building up its stupendously successful journals. Twelve years ago that company, after succeeding with *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, bought an old paper called *The Country Gentleman*. The paper then had about 25,000 subscribers. It now has nearly a million. The editor in discussing a series of articles which I was to write for his paper said: "Mr. Smith, perhaps you think it cannot be done, but every principle of agriculture can be told around the story of a man. Find the man who is applying it.

Get his story. Tell it and by that means bring out the principle."

The paper that adopted the policy of presenting general principles in terms of the concrete has gained more than 200 subscribers a day for the last dozen years. It is the same kind of wisdom that is embedded in those parables of Scripture that we remember most easily. Abraham Lincoln was eternally telling stories with a point, and surely he won a great hold on the minds of average Americans.

As with the principles of religion or the principles of agriculture, so with the principles of geography. They are best taught in terms of the geography of human life. Moreover, this approach will appeal to that intellectual interest most universal in all mankind—the interest in people. This is the interest behind the story-teller at the nomad camp fire, the movie audience in our crowded cities, and the glittering society circle at the Metropolitan Opera House. The geography that shows the earth as the home of people essentially like ourselves except as modified by geographic environment and racial inheritance will tend to make the whole world kin. Through them abstract ideas can be made clear.

This method can best be shown by examples, and for that purpose I have chosen four:

1. Trade and transportation are very important as a part of the life of peoples. Or to put it in the words of a well known text for beginners, "Any country that has not advanced far usually has very poor roads." If you read that abstract fact to a normal boy he will probably count the marbles in his pocket and look past you out the window, and the girls will fix their hair. Then try the idea in another way. Tell them about the daily life, the work and play of the Indians or the Eskimos; help the pupils to feel the effort of peoples who live with little or no trade and who therefore must make their own things or do without the things. Then let the class compare the life

of these peoples with our own life. Every phase of the contrast will show how large a part commercial intercourse with other peoples plays in our complex civilization. The children will forget their marbles and their hair. Thus you can make them understand and remember that trade and transportation are very important in the life of peoples. You can even make them feel it, and man is above all an emotional creature, a creature who feels before he acts.

At the same time that you have been teaching this piece of fundamental economic geography about *trade* and *transportation*, you have been telling *how the Indians live*, *how the Eskimos live*, and *what kind of countries* each of these peoples inhabit. Yet more, you have at the same time also been teaching *how the country which these people inhabit influences their daily lives* and hence their thought and even their *government*.

It is easy to explain tribal government when you have these scattered groups of sparse populations so clearly laid out in their setting. This is the best way to show the difference between tribal government and our own fixed and formal government with its policemen, roads, schools, magistrates, and courts.

2. Nomads are people who move from place to place and usually live in tents. Stated in this brief form this piece of information at once demands explanation. Does it happen because of the whim of some people who like tents better than houses, and moving better than fixity? Each year a certain portion of college freshmen assure me that Arabs are nomads *because it is their nature to be so*.

A study of the environment of the desert's edge gives quite another reason. There is a land of scanty rain, a land too dry for the farm, and producing only scattered grass in wide areas where water holes are far apart. Since man cannot eat grass, his only chance for life is to depend upon the animals that can eat grass—flocks. The

flocks must move to where there is water and grass, so since the flocks move, the man who must live upon the flocks must move also. Around this fact of an industry which arises from the base fact of environment and exists over vast areas of the earth's surface a whole society is built and incidentally a great class of humanity and a clear cut type of society are also explained.

3. One of the fundamental principles of geography might be stated as follows: "Water absorbs heat slowly and absorbs a great deal of it. Water also gives heat out slowly, and for these reasons ocean currents flowing from cold seas cool the climate of places to which they flow and conversely warm currents flowing from warm seas warm the climate of places to which they flow." Or, in the words of a popular grammar school textbook, "Where the wind blows steadily, as in the trade wind belts, there is a permanent drift of water in the direction of the prevailing winds. In this way a great system of ocean currents is formed. These have an important influence on the temperature of the earth." This piece of information needs to be illustrated before it becomes clear. Shall it be taught some day, any day indeed, all by itself with no examples, no significance pointed out? That is the strictly logical way to do it. Another way is to save this piece of pure science until you study West Europe, especially the United Kingdom. Here we have at hand the illuminating fact (perhaps you want to call it a problem) of two profoundly different countries facing each other in similar latitudes across the Atlantic Ocean. Labrador, the cold, the empty, the partially unexplored; England, green with verdure, where sheep pasture on the hills the year round, historic, populous, rich, powerful, the seat of wide reaching empire. Labrador is swept by winds from a cold land and by the ocean current that brings icebergs down from Greenland's icy mountains. England is bathed by the Gulf

Stream drift which flows northwestward from Florida's coral strands, and is swept by winds that blow inland from this warm drift.

By bringing in ocean currents at this place in the presentation of geography the scientific facts of ocean circulation help to explain other facts of the most far-reaching import. That is the psychological rather than the logical, the applied science rather than the systematic science method.

4. Take lumbering. Shall it be told in a little essay up in the front of the book all alone? By no means. In dealing with New England we have a wonderful opportunity to let the lumbering industry explain the highlands of New England, of the Adirondacks or of the Lake Region or the Highlands of Ontario and Quebec or of all of them. In all of these areas the earth's surface is so rough that it is difficult, often impossible, to haul logs over it, but the annual blanket of snow levels it all up. Indeed lumbering is almost a function of winter snow. The sled permits teams or tractors to haul the logs over rocks, stumps, and fallen trash to the stream bank. The melting snow makes freshets that carry the logs down stream to the saw mills and paper mills of the lower courses where the water-wheel furnishes the power to grind the logs to pulp or cut them into planks.

This treatment of the lumber industry permits us to make an understandable presentation of an industry *and at the same time to present the salient facts of a region and show how nicely a climatic (geographic) factor aids an industry.*

In the southern states where there is no cover of snow logging is carried on quite differently, with ox carts and donkey engines using cables. This gives opportunity for comparison with snowclad New England or Michigan.

In the tropic jungle, tied together with creepers, it is extremely difficult and expensive to make roads. Therefore, it costs much to convert trees into lumber and but

little is used. These facts offer fine opportunity for comparison of the way in which forests and climate combine to aid or hinder man in getting out wood. This also shows again the dependence of the lumber industry upon transport.

In conclusion we may say that geography is a complex subject. It is saved from being a chaos when we remember that geography is an interpretation, not merely a mass of facts.

This interpretation is made easier by the use of the applied-science or psychological method which starts with explanation and correlation—the reason why, the soul of memory. This runs naturally into comparison, which is the soul of understanding.

The applied-science method is especially adapted to the use of the actual story of human life. This story method, as a method of teaching the principles of geography, is the soul of interest. It reaches the child and awakens enthusiasm, as a father told me, who wrote that his little girl wanted to stay up late at night to read a new geography book written in this way.

J. RUSSELL SMITH

MENCKEN LAYS ON AGAIN

Henry L. Mencken, editor and Professor of Things in General, wields his shillalah with characteristic vigor in the March *American Mercury*. "Pedagogy," he asseverates, "is fast descending to the estate of a childish necromancy." On the basis of evidence gleaned from Dr. Pendleton's *The Social Objectives of School English*, Mencken further states that "some of the worst idiots, even among pedagogues, are among the teachers of English." The gloomy view he takes is not altogether to be wondered at in view of the disclosures made in Dr. Pendleton's study, a review of which is to be found elsewhere in this issue.

THE PERMANENT COURT OF INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

DURING the past year a growing interest in the World Court has been apparent in the United States, and in the near future the Senate will be called upon to vote on a resolution that would make the United States a member of the Court.

The idea of a World Court is nearly a century old in America. William Ladd, who founded the American Peace Society, published his "Essay on a Congress of Nations" (1840) in which he advocated a congress of ambassadors of all nations and a court composed of the most able citizens to arbitrate or judge such cases as should be brought before it. The congress was to be the legislature, and the court the judiciary in the government of nations. The executive functions of this plan were to be left with public opinion. Various societies in America have given considerable publicity to this plan since its proposal.

At the First Hague Conference in 1899, the American representatives presented a plan for a World Court before the assembled delegates. The American proposal was as follows: "A court to be created by not less than nine sovereign states. One judge to be elected from each state, chosen by a majority of the members of the highest court of that state. A bench of judges, not less than three or more than seven, to be chosen by the tribunal for each case. The states to agree to submit all questions of disagreement between them, except such as 'might relate to their political independence or territorial integrity.' The court to be open to all states and open at all times, and its records to be accessible. . . . This plan was modified into a court of arbitration with a panel of judges from which a special court might be selected for each case."