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WHAT THE WAR SHOULD DO FOR OUR METHODS IN GEOGRAPHY*

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This great war, more than any other war in history, has focused the world's attention upon the map. Every nation has been involved, some at grips with death; and even the remotest neutral nation has paid tribute to the Kaiser in unsettled markets and ruined enterprises. In America these disturbing influences have been marked. We have been keenly alert to every phase of the great conflict. We have watched its course day by day from Tsing Tao to the Falkland Islands and then to the Skagerrak; the fighting in Togo, the Cameroons, Damaraland, and East Africa; the tragedies of Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Armenia; the varying flood of events on the Italian front; in Rumania; on the front in France, from St. Mihiel to Flanders; and on the long eastern front from Riga to Odessa. We have learned of the heroism and dramatic travels of the 80,000 Czecho-Slovaks, and their deathless glory in their desperate ventures in the cause of freedom. And now we are watching the birth of a flock of little republics, most of whose very names were unknown to the mass of Americans four years ago. Our sons and brothers from every community in our broad land have gone by the million into the service, in various parts of Europe and Asia, getting geography at first hand and writing home innumerable letters from places heretofore unheard of by their families.

THE LESSON OF THE MAP

So suddenly has our attention been demanded for all four quarters of the earth, and so ignorant are most of us in geography, that our newspapers early found that the most valuable bit of news they could publish was a map, which would put before the reader's eye the location of the event chronicled. All the magazines have learned the same good lesson, and even the most staid and sober of the literary magazines, which has always in dignified

*An address at the general session of the Superintendents' Meeting of the National Education Association at Auditorium theater, Chicago, February 27, 1919.

superiority kept its pages free from illustrations, has followed suit in these years with maps.

Our navy shares with Britain in the rule of the seas. Our shipbuilding program looks to the future. We built last year almost 3,000,000 tons of shipping and are building now at the rate of 2,000,000 tons a year. Our lads are still enlisting for naval service, and a half million of them soon will be finding themselves in all the ports of the world; we at home shall be keeping track of them and learning lessons in place geography in the most natural and effective way.

OUR WORLD POSITION IN COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

As far back as 1890 our country "reached its majority" in the matter of foreign trade. Manufactures and commerce have grown vastly since then, and for the past two years the total value of our foreign trade has passed the mark of \$9,000,000,000. We are far and away the greatest nation on earth in foreign trade, and we are only beginning to grow. When we stop to think that our country has over one-half of all the known coal in the world and is producing almost one-half of the world's iron, three-fourths of the world's copper, two-thirds of the world's petroleum, and two-thirds of the world's cotton—and this is only the beginning of a long list of advantages we claim as ours—we can see plainly that our manifest destiny is to do the manufacturing for half the world and to assume presently the responsibility for half the world's foreign commerce.

All this should make it as plain as a pikestaff that we are not to be permitted longer to remain a provincial people. We must look over the horizon and learn the geography of other lands. We must see to it that all our children get this general acquaintance with the world at large. Since we are the world's greatest commercial nation, we cannot escape the call for a large and general development of commercial geography—the study of the geographic principles underlying the production of the raw materials of commerce and the distribution of these materials in the markets of the world. It is an inspiration to see that the government, in making, through the Federal Board for Vocational Education, a careful canvass of what education is essential for the development

of our industry and commerce, is discovering geography, and especially commercial geography, to be an indispensable element in all such preparation.

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Now comes the conclusion of the war, when the victors are working out the details of a league of nations which shall make it forever impossible for the world to be drawn again into a general war, and we find ourselves as a nation, because of the great advantages bestowed upon us, facing the prospect of bearing a large proportion of the responsibilities of the league, of sharing in policing the world, and of seeing to it that every people, however small, shall be given its right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We shall possibly be called upon to act as sponsor to a number of small nations all over the earth and we are all going to take a patriotic pride in this business of assuring the "square deal" and, willy-nilly, we shall all be drilled still farther in geography.

As a nation we are distinctly above the horizon. We are very much in the family of nations. We may not play the rôle of recluse any longer, may not be provincial any more. Rapid transportation by steamboat and railway, the annihilation of space and time by telegraph and telephone, and our tremendous advance in foreign trade have made isolation and provincialism forevermore impossible. We *must* become good geographers and have a general acquaintance not only with our own country but also with the family of nations outside our own.

PRESENT STATUS OF GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

When we turn to our schools to ask what provision there is for all this general training, we find geography teaching at a low ebb. As a rule in the common schools geography is offered only in three or four years. In many schools the pupil is given no training in geography after the sixth grade. Even so, what teaching there is is often so poorly done that the pupil goes on into his life work with as near nothing in the way of geographic training as can be imagined. A generation ago some emphasis was put upon place geography, and the older men and women of today have some knowledge of the map to fall back upon as the horizon

of our daily interest takes us out into the world. But there came a protest against this drill on the map—this “sailor geography,” and, without taking pains to inquire what was bad about it or how we might better do the part that was worth doing in place geography, we decided that it was easier to call it a bad name and drop it. With it we dropped nearly all interest in the subject. So far has this lack of interest in geography as a school subject carried us that we hardly expect an entering college student to know any geography at all. I have had in my own classes teachers of long standing in the schools of a great city, who could not even *name* half the states in the United States and who on a test in a hundred place names in general geography might get but thirteen to twenty of them right. Successful business men within my horizon have in the last two years been surprised to learn that the Ukraine is a region and not a breakfast food. One man interested in selling a product in Australia asked what part of South America Australia is in, anyway! A professor in a prominent eastern university could not answer the question “What is Milwaukee?”

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE TRAINING SCHOOLS

A very slight search for reasons for this general apathy, this evasion of the opportunity and duty of getting all the pupils of our schools well grounded in geography, shows that the study of geography for the purpose of teaching it is largely ignored in normal schools and other schools for the training of teachers. There are not many such schools where the subject has a fair share of the student teachers' time, or where competently trained instructors are given an opportunity for developing such training, or where instructors who have the training are given adequate equipment for a proper development of the science. There are normal schools of some standing, in which provision for training the young geography teacher is limited to one term or to one half year in the course; and then geography is but one of four or five subjects carried abreast. In many schools one or two years of Latin or German may be offered, and in some cases required of young people who are presently assigned by the principal to classes in geography. Some wit has pointed out that one of the greatest handicaps against the development of geography in our

schools is the fact that the geography text is printed in English. If it had a language of its own, or even a peculiar vocabulary, like Latin, or German, or chemistry, or domestic science, then some preliminary training for the teaching of it would be granted. As it is, it often happens that a young teacher who has not even been exposed to geography since the seventh or eighth grade, is required to teach a class, often with results which on the surface seem to warrant the principal or the school board in still further ignoring the subject.

WHAT THE WAR HAS SHOWN REGARDING GEOGRAPHY

What, then, has the war done toward indicating needed changes in our methods in geography? It has shown the absolute need of reorganizing the course of study in our schools, of bringing geography up to a par with English and arithmetic as an essential in the liberal education of all our children. It might be profitable to have some work in geography in every year in the grades. The war has shown the utter folly of expecting good geography teaching without providing for the adequate training of the young person who is expected later to teach the subject.

THREE ESSENTIAL COURSES

It is certain that, following all the work that can be done in the grades, there should be provided in the high school at least three separate units of work in geography, which might well occupy three terms or three half years: (1) the principles of geography, (2) commercial or economic geography, and (3) commercial countries.

The first of these units is an element of the highest significance in the liberal education of every student and might with perfect propriety be required as rigidly as a knowledge of common arithmetic. The second course, commercial geography, is of the largest value in opening up the horizon of the world's activities in industry and commerce. It should by all means be a part of the necessary general education of every boy or girl who is to go into the business world and as an element in a liberal education is of almost equal value with the course on principles just mentioned. The third course, commercial countries, would be offered late in the high school work. It might occupy a whole year with profit,

and it would be the beginning of special training leading to active commercial work in the business world.

NEED FOR EQUIPMENT

It is plain also that adequate teaching in geography calls for a generous equipment in globes, maps, atlases and other texts, and pictures such as photographs, stereographs, and lantern slides. It should be considered just as essential to have this material equipment for geography as to have a laboratory with reagents and apparatus for chemistry.

THE TEACHER AND THE PAY QUESTION

Finally, the whole question of teachers' pay should be opened up. A young person cannot afford to get the preparation necessary for doing good work in teaching, unless there is a decent living wage in prospect. There are many city schools in which the janitors are better paid than any of the teachers, where the plumber who comes to mend a leaky pipe is paid more than the principal of the school. That is because the janitors and the plumbers have unions and can demand a living wage. It might be a good plan for the teachers to form unions and play the game too. It is necessary that the teachers' pay should be sufficient to do a little more than merely buy clothes and pay board bills. It should be possible for a geography teacher to lay by a little, to travel a bit now and then out into the world, and to get at first hand some of the geographic relations and conditions he is teaching to his pupils. Under present conditions most of the able men and women avoid teaching and choose some other occupation where a better living is possible. Those who stay by are either missionaries, having an interest in the teaching and in the boys and girls and knowing that it is a good service, or they are the left-overs—the servants that are “worthy of the hire”—that is, the kind of product the school board bargains for with the salary offered. One is reminded of the honest Minnesota girl who, when some one railed at her for the quality of her teaching, replied, “Ah, it's little they pays me, and it's little I teaches thim!”

THE CALL OF THE NEW DAY

These are some of the larger needs which the world war has shown us. If we could only realize that geography is much more

than the knowledge of the map; that it is much more than industry and commerce; that it has for its special province the relations between men and the physical influences in which they live, the relation of all life to its physical environment; if we could get the vision that "modern geography is characterized by the search for truth in the field of science, and even more by the desire to render its truths of service to mankind; if we could only see that its subject matter touches the life and welfare of the human race more intimately and fundamentally than that of any other science; that geography possesses in itself high cultural and disciplinary value and contributes eminently to good citizenship," we should awake at the call of the new day and prepare our boys and girls for the new era now being ushered in. If we are wise, we shall examine our course of study carefully, throw out non-essentials, and elevate the science of geography to the proud place it deserves in the general education of the future American citizen.

A NEW DEFINITION OF GEOGRAPHY*

By H. W. FAIRBANKS,
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It has long been the writer's opinion that the subject of elementary school geography falls far short of accomplishing what it might accomplish—is in fact a practical failure. This he believes to be attributable partly to the obscurity that invests the whole matter of content and partly to the absurdities and inconsistencies involved in the methods of instruction commonly employed.

PRESENT STATE OF GEOGRAPHY

One cannot judge of the real condition of geography instruction by the excellent ideas now and then voiced by some progressive teacher in one of the educational journals. These articles

* This article should be compared with Professor Fenneman's Presidential Address to the Association of American Geographers, 1918, abstracted in the April number of the *Journal*. The trend of thought is essentially similar: Professor Fenneman speaks in more general terms. Dr. Fairbanks has the teaching of school geography especially in mind.—EDIT. NOTE.