A NEW REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE WORLD

BY

MARION I. NEWBIGIN

D.Sc. (Lond.)

EDITOR OF THE SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE,
AUTHOR OF "THE MEDITERRANEAN LANDS," "CANADA," ETC.

WITH SKETCH-MAPS, DIAGRAMS, AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

SINCE this book was written the political frontiers of Europe have changed considerably. In particular Germany has expanded and Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland cannot for the present be regarded as independent political units. In view of the uncertainty as to the duration of these changes, with which all teachers of Geography are familiar, it was felt not to be practicable to undertake an exhaustive revision of the text. Small alterations have, however, been effected.

November, 1940.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THIS book is intended primarily for use in the upper forms of schools where geography is taken seriously. It is hoped that, along its own lines, it is sufficiently comprehensive to meet the needs of those preparing for examinations in which regional geography is included, and also to furnish the necessary basis of world knowledge to those who propose to follow up the subject at a University. But it has also a somewhat wider aim. With few exceptions colleges and higher institutions now offer courses in advanced geography, and elementary geographical teaching in schools has shown notable advances in recent years. There seems, however, to be a definite hiatus between the geography taught in schools, excellent though that often is in its own way, and the aspects of the subject studied in the Universities, a hiatus which does not exist in the case of some other subjects. Not only do University teachers complain that their students

often come to them inadequately prepared, but they find themselves further handicapped by the fact that some of those students, as well as a much wider public, have little appreciation of the interest and complexity of the subject in its modern form. Thus the main object of the book is both to attempt to show that geography can be profitably carried on to the very end of the school course, and to indicate some of its bearings on the problems we have all to face in later life. In other words, it has been prompted by a desire to help to create that educated public opinion which is essential for the progress of any subject. No attempt has therefore been made to avoid difficulties; rather has the appeal been made to that adolescent zeal which finds keen satisfaction in grappling with difficulties.

Sketch-maps and diagrams, though I believe adequate, have been deliberately limited in number. Text-book maps can never compete in accuracy or effectiveness with the work of the great cartographical establishments, and their presence in excess is too apt to lead to the neglect of the atlas and topographical map. Those included are intended to illustrate points either not shown or not readily made out on an ordinary atlas map, and to give hints of the kind of map which the reader should draw for his own use. It will be noted in particular that the last chapter contains no maps, but obviously affords opportunities for much individual illustration of the points made.

For many of the maps I am indebted to my sister, Miss Florence Newbigin. Of the others Fig. 10 is reproduced from the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, and Figs. 86 and 41 from my own *Canada*.

I have to express my grateful thanks to those who kindly lent the photographs to which their names are attached on the plates.

M. I. N.

EDINBURGH
1929.

INTRODUCTION

THE main object of geography may be said to be to bring out the relation between the life of organisms—of plants, animals and, particularly, of man—and the physical conditions which prevail on the surface of the globe. Those physical conditions vary notably from place to place, both in mass and in detail. Thus we have those fundamental climatic contrasts which result from the movements of the earth and its relation to the sun, and those great local differences in structure and relief which have their origin in its geological history. But we soon learn that the broad divisions based on climatic zones or outstanding relief features are of comparatively little help in giving us a picture of the earth's variety and complexity. In detail the difference between one mountain belt and another, between this and that area of tropical climate, and so forth, are very great.

Nor is this all: the organic responses to the physical conditions are also diverse, whether we consider plant or animal or man. Thus it is quite often stated that cactuses, which form the characteristic plants of desert areas, are part of the organic response to arid conditions. But with a single doubtful exception cactuses are limited to the American continent, and so far from being characteristic of deserts they are notable for their absence from the deserts of Africa, Asia and Australia, except where introduced by man. What is true is that desert plants show everywhere certain superficial resemblances to one another, the result of adaptation to similar conditions of life. Closer examination, however, shows that these resemblances mask real and profound differences.

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Human societies show more than a little analogy. In an elementary survey it may be justifiable to speak of forest communities, tundra communities, and so on, as if an apparent similarity of physical conditions necessarily stamped the same imprint on the group; but more detailed knowledge renders such generalisations of little value. The resemblance in the physical conditions is often not so close as it appears; the human response is often highly complex.

Take a simple and familiar example. Parts of eastern England show, in the structure and relief of the lands, in the climate and vegetation, in certain aspects of the life of the inhabitants, much correspondence to areas on the mainland opposite. But while that correspondence would at once strike a stranger, to Englishmen it is far less obvious than the differences. These seem so overwhelming that the statement that the British Isles are but a separated fragment of continental Europe has for them an air of paradox. They feel instinctively that both their country and they, as its inhabitants, have an individuality, a differentness from other lands and other peoples which cannot be interpreted purely in terms of structure, relief, climate, drainage and so forth. That differentness comes, they know, from the fact that their forbears have lived long in these islands, that they inherit from them a tradition which seems to exert more influence than the purely physical elements of their surroundings. It is true that that tradition has its basis in physical features; but it is not always the obvious and outstanding features which exert most influence. For the physical geographer the shallow ditch of the North Sea is only a minor topographical accident; but it has had an enormous and cumulative effect on the peoples which it separates and yet links.

The difficulties facing a truly scientific treatment of geography thus appear very great. So varied is the surface of the globe that to acquire a detailed knowledge of the whole may seem a life's work, and yet such a

knowledge even if acquired would be but the beginning of geography. So varied and so complex are man's responses to these surface conditions, so much influenced by causes not in themselves directly and wholly geographical, that the broad and simple generalisations that served in the elementary stages seem a snare rather than a guide.

For such reasons some geographers maintain that more advanced work should be based on an intensive survey of particular parts of the surface, chosen so as to be as representative as possible. Such an intensive survey, it is said, makes it possible to bring out specific instances of man's response to his physical environment, with a certainty not otherwise obtainable. The alternative is regarded as being a world survey too superficial to be of any great value, supplemented by generalisations which more accurate and detailed knowledge might disprove.

There is much to be said in favour of such a limited, intensive survey; but it has great and obvious disadvantages. At the present time no part of the habitable world can be said to be completely isolated from the rest, and a limited and selective survey necessarily leaves out of account some of the factors which mould the lives of the inhabitants of the chosen areas. Great Britain is particularly notable for the multiplicity of its contacts with other lands, and the need for its inhabitants to fit themselves to discharge the elementary duties of citizenship demands a wide knowledge of the world. Is it possible, within reasonable limits, to take a world survey which shall combine a broad outlook with sufficient study of detail in regard to the more important areas to add interest and check hasty generalisation? This is the problem which this book attempts to solve, and some preliminary notes on aims and methods seem desirable.

The old division of the globe into continents does not correspond wholly with the outlook of the modern geographer. In particular, the division of the landmass of the Old World into the three continents of Europe,

Asia and Africa has many disadvantages. It has been accepted here, however, with minor modifications in detail, for reasons of practical convenience.

Much more difficult is the question of the best way of subdividing the continents. The multiplicity of the political units in post-war Europe, no less than the vast size of some of the states of the New World, make some sub-division other than the purely political one a necessity if geography is to have any kind of rational basis. Here the conception of natural regions, founded by the late Dr. Herbertson and much elaborated since, is fundamental. The underlying idea is simple. On looking at any part of the earth's surface we perceive that, because of the great and sudden changes in structure and relief which occur from place to place, all the other phenomena which depend upon these basal facts, such as the particular type of climate, the characteristic plants and animals, and the life of man, change also, if less suddenly. A natural region, large or small, is thus an area with some unity of structure and relief, reflected in its climate and in the organic response to the sum total of the physical conditions. It displays in some or all of these respects a definite contrast to surrounding areas.

Because structure and relief form the basis of a division into such natural regions, these subjects are of prime importance. All reasoned geography indeed must take as its starting-point the build of the lands in the areas discussed. In this connection it is important to notice that while ordinary atlas maps usually show orographical colouring, that is give an indication of the heights of the lands above sea-level, it is at least rare to find among them plates representing even the essential structural features of the continents. Thus a small-scale orographical map of Europe will show, e.g., the central plateau of France in the same tints as parts of the Alpine chain, and affords no hint of those profound differences in structure and detailed relief between the two which are geographically so much

more important than the accident of similarity of height above sea-level. In such a preliminary survey of world geography as this the effects of the structure of the different lands on other geographical phenomena can be worked out in detail in certain cases only. Everywhere, however, great emphasis has been laid on these subjects, because in this way the key is given to the interpretation of atlas maps; the foundations are laid on which more detailed knowledge can be built as the need or the occasion arises.

For a somewhat similar reason the natural vegetation zones of the chief land-masses have been studied in some detail. The plant-cover of an area forms the best key to the sum-total of the climatic conditions, gives a much clearer picture than the plates showing isotherms reduced to sea-level, and mean annual rainfall, still so popular in atlases. Here again we have a basis for the interpretation of political maps, even although the actual significance of the natural plant-cover in relation to human life has been worked out in detail in this book only in the case of a few representative areas.

Two other points have to be noted. We have included as part of the concept of a natural region the notion that the modes of life practised by its occupants should show some characteristic features, no less than the plant-cover. But there is a very obvious difference between the adjustments to given conditions shown by the plants and the human communities. In the latter case not only is the adaptation conscious and deliberate, but the time element enters very largely. When a continent or a part of a continent has been inhabited by progressive and civilised peoples for a prolonged period of time, not only has adjustment between human societies and particular parts of the surface become peculiarly close, but the experience of the ages has, as it were, underlined the limits of the regions, so that these are at once apparent. From this again it follows that it is much easier to distinguish natural

regions in lands of old civilisation than of new. Further, in the old lands there is at least a tendency for political and administrative units to show some kind of relation to natural regions. The mathematically straight lines which often serve both as political and administrative frontiers in the new lands may be regarded from one point of view as an indication that natural regions in the complete sense do not as yet exist there. Nature has certainly drawn limits; but civilised man is as yet but an intruder, too few in numbers, too recent an immigrant, to have been compelled to adjust himself accurately, to take full advantage of his opportunities. In such continents as South America and Australia in particular, where large tracts of virtually unsettled lands exist, a detailed division into natural regions seems unnecessary in an outline study such as this. It is sufficient to indicate the general characters of the continents, and to limit details to the crystallisation points, the areas within which developments are taking place.

In such cases a difference of treatment seems justified because one element of the complete natural region, the adapted human group, is absent. In parts of the old lands, particularly in north-central and eastern Europe, an analogous cause demands a corresponding change of outlook. Here the lands appear on the map monotonously dull and featureless; nature seems to have set no obvious limits. But the historical movements of racial stocks, their impacts upon each other, their actions and reactions, show up, as it were, the minor details of topography, indicate where man has found limits to particular modes of life. In this case, then, historical facts have been freely introduced. Russia, in particular, may be said to illustrate the significance of the natural region negatively by showing how slow and difficult is the rise of a stable community where structure and relief are markedly uniform over wide areas, so that a human region has to be created where a natural region in the usual sense scarcely exists.

Generally it may be said that no rigid consistency of treatment throughout has been attempted. An effort has been made, within definite limits of space, to survey the world in such a fashion as to bring out the aims and methods of the modern geographer, to open windows rather than merely to present facts.

Facts there may seem to be, however, in superabundance. In particular it may be thought that too much emphasis has been laid on relief, and too little on attempts to interpret its significance. Both the emphasis and the omissions, where they occur, are deliberate. Not only is the varied relief of the earth's surface the geographer's starting-point, the fundamental fact, but a description of relief features is without value unless it is accompanied by close and careful map-study, and leads to an attempt to express the facts on a sketch-map. The detailed descriptions given are thus intended both to show what should be looked for on the map, and to drive home the lesson that familiarity with maps is the beginning and the end of geographical wisdom.

The apparent absence in much of the text of definitely formulated reasons for the distributions described may seem strange, in view both of their intrinsic interest and of the space they occupy in books of a more elementary nature. But the necessary material is there, though it has been left to the enthusiast to bring it together and thus taste the joys of independent discovery. Some hints as to lines of approach will be found in the supplementary chapter at the end of the book.

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