

THE STATUS OF GEOGRAPHY TEACHING.

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A FEW years since, while lecturing on geographical topics at an educational association, I was interrupted by a teacher who propounded the question—"In drawing a map, which should the pupil be taught to insert first, the rivers or the mountains?" Recalling my own earlier experiences in forcing drainage courses many miles out of their proper positions so as to avoid hachure lines that had been too freely distributed, I promptly gave the first choice to rivers. Immediately on my preference being expressed, pandemonium seemed for a moment let loose. On inquiring the cause of my offence, it was explained that Professor Blank (a well-known educational reformer) had taught them that God made the mountains before He made the rivers, and therefore pupils should be taught to chart the mountains first and the water-courses afterward.

Now, the professor had doubtless instructed his corps of teachers thoroughly and impressively, but unfortunately he was not on sufficiently familiar terms with the works of the Almighty to comprehend the natural sequence of physiographic events. As a matter of fact, mountains are by no means always older than the streams associated with them, and in this particular case the stream that passed almost before the good professor's doorway had the prior right of way, and flowed in the same channel it now occupies long before the Appalachian folds were thrust above the present datum level of the stream. Here was a grand object lesson for a body of teachers to study, but in its place they had been fed with a few commonplace platitudes imposed upon them under the guise of improved "methods."

During the past seven years it has been my fortune to attend educational associations in many States, and I have heard the exponents of half a score of fads exploit their wares to an aggregate of twenty-five or thirty thousand teachers. With few exceptions the most noteworthy thing about the lecturers was their crass ignorance of the fundamental principles of modern geographic science. In other words, the instructor attempted to demonstrate what he considered the only proper method of teaching a subject about which he knew practically nothing, to an assembly of teachers who were not wiser than himself.

Unfortunately this sort of teaching is the rule rather than the exception. At the yearly institute as well as at the normal school, the instructor in geography is almost wholly without training in the subject he undertakes. In fact I do not know of a normal school in the United States in which the instructor in geographic science is a trained geographer. In employing an instructor of mathematics or of language a board of trustees is usually careful to select a teacher critically educated in the subject to be taught; the teacher of geography, on the contrary, is required to present no evidence of special training. Why this is the case, is a question that must be left to the various boards to be answered. The result, however, is fast becoming painfully apparent.

For want of qualified teachers of geography, the character of the work done has improved but little, if it has at all, in the past twenty years. In the schools of the larger Eastern cities it has deteriorated. In New York, where most of the work is done orally, the elementary instruction consists mainly in the cramming of sufficient