

SOME METHODS OF TEACHING GEOGRAPHY.

BY ALIDA S. WILLIAMS, N. Y. CITY.

ONE of the most interesting and profitable studies in our course if properly taught, one of the most tiresome and valueless if incorrectly taught, is geography. Geographical statistics, the area of countries in square miles, their populations, the value of their exports, the bare names of their towns, rivers and mountains—in a word, the dry bones of a study which should be a living organism, are worse than worthless; such instruction is a waste of valuable time, and useless even as memory training.

Many of these statistics should be relegated to their proper place—the tables of books of reference. Who knows the population of Africa or Asia? At best, such numbers are but a mere guess. Yet the children of our Fourth Grammar Grade are required to learn what must in the nature of things be inaccurate—statistics that want the sole merit of their species, exactness.

The topography of a country is best taught by means of map-drawing. This invaluable aid to the study of geography possesses other merits than that of being the best means of impressing localities upon the minds of our youthful draughtsmen (and women). It employs the hand, that often neglected member, brings into play the judgment, that usually neglected faculty, and in consequence of both these facts, interests and occupies, while instructing, restless children who are always attracted by the concrete. We expect the impossible when we ask children to be satisfied with generalizations and abstractions that are but withered husks to their eager minds.

In taking up a country which is

new to the class, place its map before them, and talk about its natural divisions first (Guyot's physical maps are the best for this purpose), its political divisions as shown by its boundary lines, its chief cities, its harbours, capes and rivers; then allow the class to draw the map upon their slates. Do not expect perfection at once, be satisfied with rough sketches at first, though doing your best to secure accuracy. The rapid improvement after the first few weeks will be surprising, and the speedy mastering of topographical features of a country seem almost miraculous to one who remembers what a weary task it is to grind capitals, chief cities, etc., into a class by the memorizing process. I have not found it expedient to attempt map-drawing from memory until after several weeks.

There is but one danger to guard against—that the teacher may forget that the maps drawn by the class are but a means and not an end. To avoid this, resist all temptations to make a show study of it.

But when all that a map can teach concerning a country is learned, the subject is but half finished. Use pictures then. I have found improvised scrap-books made of stout brown paper, and containing pictures cut from magazines, illustrated papers, old geographies, etc., and kept where the pupils could have recourse to them at noon or before nine o'clock, extremely useful. The children are delighted to assist in making these books, and to use them after they are made. They seem to feel that the next best thing to seeing the places studied about is to see their pictures, and they do not forget what the eye