

## BOOK REVIEWS

John H. Wise. *Geography and the Teacher*. Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1966, 243 pp. Appendices. Index.

John H. Wise, et al. *Elementary School Geography, a Handbook of Ideas*. Montreal: West Island School Board, 1966, n.p., mimeo.

Improvements in the teaching of school geography in Canada have come discouragingly slowly in the past three or four decades. It has long been recognized that in North America the subject occupies an inferior place in the school time-table, is usually taught by non-specialist staff, and is rarely studied by the most able high school students. By contrast, children elsewhere are provided with a sound appreciation of world geography and master at least the more elementary of its special skills.

How to bring about a dramatic change in this discouraging situation, has puzzled the small company of Canadian geographers who are concerned about the schools. About twenty-five years ago, it was believed that a start could be made with improved textbooks, and there has since undoubtedly been some change for the better in these, but the overall effect on the schools appears to have been slight. Satisfactory teaching accomodation and equipment are still rare, and the lowly status accorded the subject by administrators and school principals remains much as it was.

The rapid expansion of geography departments in the universities — and it has been quite phenomenal — has certainly brought about an awareness of the science in government and business and has provided some recruits to the small group of qualified high school teachers. Yet the impact on the schools of the country as a whole seems to have been minimal. What now needs to be done to carry over into the schools the undoubted improvement in the quality and standing of geography at the university level? The two publications being reviewed may provide the answer. Canada badly needs well qualified geographers who devote their efforts to teacher training, and there is also need for materials that can be of direct aid to the teacher in the classroom. As a supplement to these we need organized groups of teachers prepared to aid their less qualified colleagues.

Professor J. H. Wise has demonstrated during his short stay at Macdonald College how much can be done by a fully qualified geographer and teacher who is prepared to devote his talents to geography in the schools. *Geography and the Teacher* is as the author states “a guide for school administrators, practising teachers and student teachers concerned with geography.” It is in fact precisely what has been lacking in Canada. Although the book is published in Queensland, it owes much of its inspiration to Dean

Neville Scarfe of the University of British Columbia, and draws on the experience the author has accumulated, not only in Australia and Canada, but also in Britain, where he served as a geography specialist in a county grammar school.

There are three main parts to the book, followed by six appendices and a useful index. Part One is concerned with geography as a discipline, and includes some very stimulating pages on "the awareness of landscape." There are many clear and simple maps and diagrams and some well chosen photographs.

Part Two is made up of four chapters, which discuss various aspects of geography and education, beginning with the heritage of geography in the school, and ending with the contributions of the subject towards international understanding. There is a succinct statement (pp. 44-45) of how accepted educational principles must lead to a changed attitude to school geography. This should, *inter alia*, make it a core subject in the curriculum, permit field work as a normal technique and bring about specially equipped geography rooms.

In discussing the principles and practice of the teaching of geography, Professor Wise provides typical teacher's notes for nine topics, ranging from the relief and build of South Africa, to farming in the north European lowland. The principles derived from these samples are then listed as seven guides to better teaching.

Two thirds of the book is taken up by Part Three, which is in essence a seven chapter guide to the teaching of school geography. The topics themselves are not new, since they cover the devices used by the best teachers during the past fifty years. They will, however, be a revelation to many and also help to bring down to earth some of the grand generalizations which tend to be offered young teachers studying methodology. How does one in fact go about using that hoary device of the "progressive" geography teacher "the sample method?" It has been advocated and employed by the most enterprising since the turn of the century. How does one provide the necessary detail to make a remote area appear as familiar as the local scene, without allowing a whole generation to carry through life an impression, for example, that Danes (a highly industrialized people), all spend their time feeding skim milk to pigs on ten acre small holdings?

Professor Wise provides six samples complete with details of how the children themselves can go about the job of studying them. Other chapters deal in a similarly practical manner with regional studies, map studies, visual geography and extra-curricula activities. A particularly timely section discusses in detail, with excellent plans, the requirements for a school geographical laboratory.

The appendices include a glossary of terms, several pages of

economic and climatic statistics and a very good bibliography which ranges from advanced works on the nature of geography to selected articles from journals devoted to the teaching of the subject.

*Geography and the Teacher* is a workmanlike practical aid to the person in the classroom faced with the daily task of presenting geography in a contemporary manner. It benefits from the author's broad personal experience in Britain, North America and Australia and should be of direct assistance to teachers everywhere. It contains some Canadian examples and its bibliography includes many items readily available in this country. As might be expected, it reflects the pedagogical views of British geographers, particularly those associated with the Institute of Education of the University of London, coloured by the author's stay at the University of British Columbia. As the manuscript was completed in 1964 it reveals little of his subsequent experience in Quebec, a geographical mission field, sorely in need of cultivation.

*The Handbook of Ideas* demonstrates the rapidity with which stimulating and qualified leadership can transform classroom teaching. A group of teachers in the West Island schools (near Montreal) spent about three months working under Professor Wise's leadership on a manual that might supplement the prescribed textbooks.

The outcome is a loose-leaf volume of lesson guides, maps, lists of teaching aids and so on for Grades IV to VII. The handbook's format makes constant revision practicable. Here is evidence if such were needed of a remarkable reserve of interest and skill in the schools, only waiting for leadership to make it available to others.

Both of the volumes reviewed suggest that geography in Canadian schools could be transformed by concentrating on staffing and equipping the teacher training institutions. Were this to be done the almost immediate impact on work done in the schools themselves would, I believe, be remarkable.

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