CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A REGIONAL SURVEY may be described as the organised study of a geographical area and its inhabitants, plant, animal and human, from every aspect, and the correlation of all aspects so as to present a complete picture of the region. In such a picture we shall see the present as a mosaic, as it were, of survivals of the past and incipient phases of the future. We shall be able to interpret the life of the region as it appears to-day in the light of its past history, and in some measure to foresee and direct its future development. The scientific survey of small regions in this comprehensive sense is a comparatively modern practice, but there is a sense in which regional survey is not merely old, but primeval. We might say that the subject of regional survey is modern but that the function of regional surveying is as old as animal life; for every young organism must, according to its individual needs and limitations, investigate its environment as a part of the technique of living; and this investigation of environment, whether it be by caterpillar or child, is the very essence of regional survey. It is also the beginning if not the end of education.

We shall see in Chapter III that the essential feature of a region, in the sense in which we use the word, is a social nucleus or centre of population. To define the limits of a region is often a difficult matter, but there can be no doubt about its nucleus, whether it be village, town, city or metropolis. The smallest social nucleus is a home, just as the smallest social unit is a family, and for
an exploring infant its home constitutes a complete region. It is well to bear in mind that even the most elaborate regional survey has its prototype in the child’s investigation of its immediate surroundings. The regional survey movement of the present century is in reality a highly developed manifestation of this same primitive or infantile function of exploration. We are thus all regional surveyors whether or not we are conscious of the fact, and our effectiveness in the world depends in large measure upon our efficiency in this rôle. We may well illustrate this view by considering the case of a family removing to a new residential district. Let us suppose that Mr Jones of Liverpool, for business reasons, has to find a new home within reach of the metropolis. He has been advised by a friend that Oxham is a desirable neighbourhood and he and his wife travel thence to make a reconnaissance of the place and its amenities. They are charmed by the general atmosphere of the locality, Mrs Jones is favourably impressed by the shops, they discover that the town contains suitable schools for the children and that the train service to London is convenient. The next step is to find a suitable residence and with this quest a more intensive survey of the neighbourhood commences. Being wise people, they will take advantage of some of the survey work that has been performed by others, particularly that which has been published in the form of a map of the neighbourhood, and that which is represented by the knowledge to be obtained from local estate agents.

Having found a house they eventually move in and subsequently each member of the family embarks upon a more leisurely survey, extending the limits of the region as time goes on. It would be intriguing to follow out in imagination the images of their new region which
they severally build up, and to place the elements of these images into the scientific categories with which the regional surveyor is concerned. We can, however, only pause to note that each would form a different image limited by his or her interests, observations and experiences. The region is infinitely more than any of these images of it, or all of them together; more than all the images that have ever been formed of it, more indeed than the completest human survey can ever discover and describe. But the recognition of our limitations need not daunt us in our efforts. The insight that unexpectedly but regularly comes to those who pursue regional studies in the field is, in itself, an ample reward for their labours, apart from the value of their work for others.

A regional survey may be undertaken from any of three motives or all of them. It may be regarded as a piece of pure research, as a method in education, or as a preliminary to a scheme of civic improvement or development, e.g. a town or regional plan.

This introduction is addressed particularly to those who are interested in regional research for its own sake and to teachers who wish to use it as an instrument in education. What we may call the amateur survey and the school survey are essentially the same, for regional research is an extended education for those who participate in it, while a survey of the school surroundings will bring the spirit of exploration into the work of the children, and often produce results that are worthy of the title of research. The products of the two types of survey will, of course, be judged by somewhat different standards, and in a school survey almost the same ground will be repeatedly traversed by successive groups of pupils; for it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the educational
value of regional survey work lies in the making of surveys and not in the study of those which have been made by others. Again, whereas the workers in a co-operative scheme of regional research will make the fullest and freest use of all recorded information about the region, such information will only be disclosed to pupil surveyors at the discretion of the teacher. For example, while elementary pupils may fittingly be required to make scale plans of the school premises and their immediate surroundings by actual measurement, an advanced surveyor would save himself this trouble by procuring the best available maps. He will make his own plans, e.g. of earthworks, only when satisfactory plans are not already obtainable. All this is not to say that a school survey will not be a progressive undertaking; on the contrary, each fresh group of pupils, if they are allowed sufficient scope, will discover new aspects of their region, and the honour of adding something to the school’s permanent collection of material will prove an inspiration to the children. Still more will this be the case if a research survey of an area including that of the school is in progress. In this case the senior pupils should be encouraged to produce work worthy of addition to this survey, which will often be housed at the library for public reference. We may add that we have seen several school surveys of which more mature survey organisations might well be proud. It is necessary, however, to guard against over-emphasising this aspect of school surveys. Their educational value will be seriously impaired if encouragement is not also given to those pupils whose work is not up to exhibition standard. The teacher will, as a matter of course, endeavour to get from every pupil the best work of which he or she is capable, but in regional survey the cruder
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efforts of the less competent children are of even greater benefit to them than their more encouraging results are to the brighter pupils.

It will not, we hope, be deemed an impertinence if we urge upon advanced workers the importance of paying heed to the mode of presentation of their results. Those readers who already realise this, will appreciate the need of so doing. Much, if not most, of the world’s best work in scientific research has been accomplished by amateurs, but amateurishness in the presentation of results should as far as possible be avoided. Good field work is often spoilt by being presented in slipshod fashion on maps, or by long and wordy descriptions instead of concise or even tabular or graphic statements. As a hobby, regional survey merits the expenditure of at least as much pains and money as, say, golf, photography or music. The regional surveyor should emulate the devotees of these cults by obtaining the necessary equipment and acquiring some skill in using it. If, for instance, one is going to spend some hours in preparing a map to show the results of some months of study it is worth spending a few pence upon a sheet of hand-made paper for the purpose, instead of using paper that will acquire a dingy appearance in the course of a year or two. It will of course often happen that the time of a first class field worker can be more profitably spent than in the more or less mechanical work of draughtsmanship, or he may have little aptitude for it. For this reason, and for the often desirable work of duplication, the services of one or more capable draughtsmen are invaluable to a survey organisation. A survey which pays heed to these matters, though its intrinsic merits may not be greater, will command infinitely more respect than one which does not.
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We may now pass on to the brief consideration of the survey as a preliminary to civic improvement or development. The scope of such a survey will necessarily be restricted more or less to the requirements of the particular purpose in view; otherwise the realisation of that purpose will run the risk of being indefinitely postponed. It is, however, an axiom of town planning that a plan which is not preceded by an adequate survey is worthless. “The object of Town Planning”, writes the Chief Town Planning Adviser to the Minister of Health, “may be briefly described as the direction of all development so that all land may be put to the use for which it is best fitted, the health, wealth and happiness of the community being paramount considerations....Town Planning is always a balance of considerations, and therefore it is obvious that all the facts of the situation, their causes and relations, should be before the planner.”¹ In the urgency of preparing a plan, however, the town planner is rarely able to make so comprehensive a survey as he would wish. He will count himself fortunate if the town for which he is called upon to make a plan is the centre of a regional survey organisation; for not only will such an organisation have gathered together a bibliography of all sources of information regarding the town and its surroundings, but it will have pursued its own inquiries in at least some of the directions that are of special value to him. Further, although the survey activities of a group of research students, or of school children, should not be “limited to items that have a clearly demonstrable practical value”, the needs of constructive planning may temporarily direct those activities into such channels.

¹ G. L. Pepler, “Regional Survey as a Preliminary to Town Planning”, South-Eastern Naturalist, 1925.
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We may fitly close this chapter by expressing the ideals of a regional survey in the words of a far-seeing regionalist. “Let us study life regionally. Let us see the town as the focus of spiritual expression. Let us try to plan, not merely to meet problems of overcrowding, but in such a way as to provide the means of maintaining all that is of vital value in the inherited tradition of the town. Let us help present tendencies towards that closer co-operation and communal action which may once more work a spiritual regeneration of our towns and of our civilisation.”

CHAPTER II

THE REGIONAL SURVEY CONSPECTUS

“All the sciences are connected; they lend each other material aid as parts of one great whole, each doing its own work, not for itself alone, but for the other parts; none can attain its proper result separately, since all are parts of one and the same wisdom.”

ROGER BACON, 1266.

THE objects of a conspectus are threefold. In the first place it should serve to show at a glance the whole scope of a regional survey and the relationships which exist between its various branches. Secondly, it should provide a sufficiently detailed summary of the whole field to enable workers in a co-operative undertaking to pick out the subjects in which they are particularly interested, at the same time showing the places occupied by these subjects in the general scheme of regional research. Lastly, it should supply a classification which will enable a society or school to arrange all its material, whether maps, graphs, tables, written matter or pictorial illustrations, in a suitable order and provide an index to them.

The diagram (Fig. 1) is an attempt to fulfil the first of these functions. If the happy child’s joyous curiosity concerning its environment survives the ordeal of examinatory education, he will of necessity pursue his studies in one or more of the branches into which field research has been divided. He will, however, be severely handicapped and the value of his work seriously limited if, as too often happens, he specialises to the extent of ignoring any or all of the aspects of nature which appear to be outside the scope of his particular “ology”. The
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diagram shows the various branches of field study arranged in an orderly sequence, thus providing the logical basis for the extended conspectus set out below. It also indicates concisely the ways in which the groups of phenomena represented by the various sciences act and react upon one another to produce the drama of the region. It has been found very helpful in teaching the interdependence of the field sciences, particularly when it has been gradually built up on the blackboard in successive lessons in conjunction with a transect diagram of the locality constructed as described in Chapter viii.

At first sight the diagram may appear rather formidable, but upon closer examination its essential simplicity will emerge. For teaching purposes it may be either simplified or elaborated according to the needs of the pupils. It should be read from below upwards, following the main headings in numerical order, and observing the arrows and the notes upon them which indicate the direction and manner of the influence of each group of phenomena upon the others.

The groups one, two and three represent the physical features of the region. Of these the earth’s crust is literally its foundation and the study of the earth’s crust, which constitutes the science of geology, is of primary importance in a regional survey. Different parts of even the smallest region will usually be found to exhibit different kinds of rock.¹ One part may be on clay, another on sandstone or gravel and yet another on chalk or limestone, while in the northern and western parts of

¹ The colloquial use of the term “rock” is somewhat narrower than its use in geology where it means mineral matter of any kind occurring naturally in large quantities. Thus, to the geologist a soft clay or a loose sandy formation is just as much rock as limestone or granite.
Fig. 1. A diagram illustrating the relationships between the various branches of regional study.