

Chapter I

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

ROBINSON CRUSOE has been a classic for two centuries, read and loved all over the world. It was written in the first instance for men to read, but boys soon discovered it. There is something fascinating about desert islands and new lands, where the world is all before you, and you have to make your home and find your way in solitudes untrodden of man. Robinson Crusoe is repeating, so far as an individual can, the experience of the human race, moving about in worlds not realized. He has to work out every problem of the earliest man for himself. He has, in the story, the advantage of coming of a civilized race and of knowing something of the use of the tools he has saved from the ship, but he has also disadvantages from which the savage and primitive man do not suffer. But the universal need of food, clothing and shelter, and the nearly universal passion for discovery, set him to work on the oldest lines which human energy has followed. He gives us in a romance something like an epitome of what we now call pre-history. Wrecked on such an island, what will be the first thing a man looks for, when it is once clear that he will not get the ship off the reef? Probably shelter, and then fresh water. When he has fetched all he can from the wreck, he will set about finding out what the island can offer. After that the "solitaire" will wish to learn what food the island produces or can be made to produce; what natural

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fruits it bears; whether it has wild animals, useful or dangerous; whether he has savage neighbours; and so forth. He will wish, sooner or later, to travel over the island, to climb its hills, to search its forests, to know all about it. So new races in new lands have ever done, French in Canada, ancient Britons in England.

Can we treat Geography in the practical spirit of Robinson Crusoe? Can we take England, or Greece, or Italy, and ask ourselves how the land looked to the people who first settled in it, how they pictured it in their minds, and how they managed to fit themselves into it? For a new land is not always ready or comfortable; and as you cannot at once fit the land to yourself, you have to fit yourself to the land.

A. RANGES, RIVERS AND ROADS

To-day we know all about isobars and isotherms—if we are under thirty. Older people, like the Greeks, never heard of them. But there are three things, much simpler and more essential, to keep in mind when we start thinking about the geography and the history of a land—Ranges, Rivers and Roads. This is a simple formula to remember, but it will be a sort of key that opens the door to a great many interesting things. The traveller about Britain, or indeed any land with a history, is brought face to face with questions. In Britain and other European lands he constantly comes upon old castles, on towns whose names end in -caster or -chester; why do so many of them stand on rivers? and how far are they from the river-mouths, or from mountains? What is it that really decides where a fortress or a town shall be? Why do some towns grow to great cities, while

RANGES, RIVERS AND ROADS

3

others never seem to grow at all, and others again dwindle away? Another question that we can hardly avoid asking is, why battles are so often fought in the same places, or very near them?

The most fixed things in a changing world seem to be the mountains. How they were made, how they came to stand where they are, men have wondered from the beginning. The Greeks wondered. A great Greek thinker, Xenophanes, travelled widely about the Mediterranean, and on hill-tops of Sicily he found the remains of sea-shells. How had they got there, he asked? Oysters have never been climbing creatures, nor had men taken them to the heights. Then, thought the Greek, the only explanation is that the Earth herself heaves up her floor sometimes till it is sky-high, and lowers the mountains into the sea. There he anticipated modern geologists. The Greeks also remarked that sometimes rivers take part in big changes; but the rivers must wait for a moment.

Look at the map of England. Three main kinds of scenery are shown there; great flat lands, sometimes rolling (as we call it), sometimes as dead flat and dull as Cambridgeshire or Lincolnshire; and again regions full of masses of rock in every sort of confusion; and thirdly, the long stretch between the Midlands and the Scottish border, where a Range (the Pennine Range) is a kind of spine to the country. The same thing is to be seen in Italy and South America; the Appennines and the Andes are the spines of those lands. North America has two great ranges, the Appalachian near the Atlantic, separated by a vast flat land of prairies and buffaloes from the Rocky Mountains.

Beginning, then, with the Ranges, we quickly get a

1-2

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

clue to the Rivers. Water, as all the sages tell us, and as we all know, will run downhill if it is let alone; and it will take the shortest, quickest and straightest way down. If Nature were as tidy and monotonous as a modern Town Council, we might find the great Range down the exact middle of the country, and all the Rivers on one side or the other of it, running at right angles to it straight for the sea. But Nature is not so dull. The Ranges are never quite straight themselves; odd hills and mountains are thrown up in odd places and turn the rivers aside; even stray rocks may do it with a stream, and it has to wriggle and twist its way as it can, always looking for the easiest path down. Sometimes, in Greece, the river cannot get out, and, as the rocks are limestone, it will dive underground, and find or make its way there, till in some suitable place it gushes out again in full volume, and runs in the open. Sometimes it is blocked altogether, and a swamp is the result. Virgil describes the river Ufens “looking for his way”; in modern times people have helped him to find it, by digging a channel for him; he takes it at once, and the land that was swamp can be used by man to good purpose, instead of merely breeding mosquitoes and agues and such things. Thessaly is a famous plain in Northern Greece; once, the Greeks believed, it had been a huge lake; but somehow—some people said a god did it, and some said an earthquake—the wall of mountain between it and the sea was burst open, and the river Peneios ran out, leaving a rich land to men. The gorge was a famous one, and an English traveller of a hundred years ago says it is very like the Avon Gorge below Bristol.

We must now think of Roads, but of something else first. As we travel by train across England or Ontario

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[More information](#)

RANGES, RIVERS AND ROADS

5

to-day, we go through a pleasant land of farms and fields; there are hedgerows in England, wire fences (because of the snow) in Ontario; in both there are trees here and there, or little clumps of wood. In old days in both countries the land was covered with thick forest. So was Europe. It is said that a squirrel might have travelled from Moscow to the Atlantic without having to set foot on the ground. Probably no squirrel ever thought of doing it; and it was ages before man dreamed of such a journey. Why should he want to travel?

There we touch a main-spring of History. How does a people get its food? Most of us know that the earliest men did not sow fields and grow grain. When they passed from the hunting stage, they took to feeding cattle. Hunger was the spur that set them looking for new kinds of food; and animals, once tamed and kept by them, were more quickly to be found than wild ones, and easier to kill. But flocks and herds need grass, and like man they need water. Again, as families grew larger, and tribes bigger, they needed more room for themselves and their beasts; sometimes, too, they felt strongly that they needed more beasts, and that by a war-party they might get them. These and other reasons set tribes afoot, to find their way to new lands and fresh water. Here, if you recall what you have read of Indians in North America, on this side of the great prairies, you will understand what Roads mean at first, and how much more they mean later on. The Indian hunter travelled immense distances. Sometimes he paddled in a birch-bark canoe, which was easier and more interesting than going afoot, but it meant difficulties when he got out of the regions where the birch grows. Sometimes he went on foot through forest; and his road was a mere trail. In very ancient

6

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

England the earliest men's trails lay along the moor tops in Yorkshire, in order to be out of the swamps. Threading their way, then, through forest, between rock and swamp, men mapped out routes, as we call them to-day, which became Roads. Not the sort of roads we see; for these are quite modern. In 1786 the poet Cowper had to ride out of Olney to look at the roads along which his cousin Lady Hesketh would have to drive when she came to stay with him; it was a question whether the mud might stop her getting through. The student of History must get rid of all notions of a Macadamized or tarred road (such roads are scarcely 150 years old yet), and remember the rhyme made up in the Highlands after the Forty-Five—

If you'd seen these roads before they were made,
You would lift up your hands and bless General Wade.

The Romans built roads, as they built walls; the Greeks found trails, travelled over them, and left it to the feet of men and of mules to make the roads—or the roads could make themselves. Sometimes a river bed served them well enough. There we touch Rivers again.

Any one who will look out of the train windows as he travels, will be apt to notice how often the train seems to be running along a river—the Thames on the Great Western, the Hudson river and then the Mohawk on the New York Central, the Fraser river on the Canadian Pacific. Why? Because the first men to build railways thought things out, and reached the same conclusions as the earliest men. The river was sure to look for the easiest way, and by sticking to the river (if it does not take too much room, as it may in gorges or after winter rains) they would find the easiest way. An early map of the Eastern

United States will show how settlers went up the river valleys—not for scenery, but because there lay the water, and hardby were the river meadows. For rivers are careless travellers, spreading themselves out and dropping their baggage; in their case, it is mud brought down from the hills—swirled along as long as the river has to rush in a gorge, dropped when it spreads itself over level ground. Note then the easy way, the water for drinking, the meadows to graze the cattle on (and by-and-by to plough and sow), and you begin to understand the first importance of Rivers and their connexion with Roads.

But men are not always going up into the country or coming down out of it. They may want to go along the coast; and that is often far more difficult. In the time of the early American settlements it was easier to go by sea than by land from one to the other, and so it was in Greece; and in some cases it still is. Few of us ever forget the young Lochinvar, and how “he swam the Esk river, where ford there was none”, or more strictly his horse did. We remember, too, the “hundred pipers, an’ a’, an’ a’”, who marched or swam across the Solway and “danced themselves dry to the pibroch’s sound”. Lochinvar was in a hurry, and the Scots pipers had reasons for crossing where they did. But the dislike of getting unnecessarily wet explains a great deal of History. Men preferred to find a ford; a ford is handier for cattle, for mules, for men carrying packs, for women and children. Roads then will go up river valleys, and cross rivers by their fords. Mountains may have to be crossed, and man will look for the pass which means least climbing; and, as a rule, it takes him from the head of one river valley over to the head of another.

This is a point to remember in reading History, how-

ever far down the story of man we go. Whether it is a primitive tribe raiding its neighbours, or a modern army, the pass and the ford (that is to say, the Road) will decide where the battle is to be. At Barrington in Cambridge-shire some years ago people turned the stream for some purpose, and, digging in its channel, they found skeletons more or less in armour, some with cracked skulls; and some of the armour was Danish, some was Saxon; it was a fight for a ford. Often, in England, and no doubt elsewhere, men in the Middle Ages would build a fort at the ford, a wooden fort, at first; and by-and-by a huge stone castle succeeded it. Any raiders, like the Danes or the hundred pipers, would then be forced to find another place, less convenient, at which to cross the river; and an armed force from the castle might quickly be upon them while they were at it and in no good trim for fighting. Look at York, Newcastle and Berwick on one side of England, and at Manchester, Lancaster and Carlisle on the West. If the Scots are invading England, they must come on one side or the other of the Range; nobody can bring a *large* body of armed men over mountain crags or through swamps. Look again at the map of Greece. Why are there always battles at Mantinea in Arcadia, in the heart of the Peloponnese? Four big battles are recorded there. Why, but that the place is at the mouth of the pass? The Spartans cannot get out northward, nor their enemies into their land of Laconia, but by that way. The Rivers then play a large part in fixing the direction of the Roads from the beginning.

B. CLAN, CANTON AND CITY

As time goes on, and as the number of families increases, and men are more and more in number, and as farming begins to take the place of hunting and warring and grazing, the tribe settles down about some river; and houses begin to be built. At this stage another formula may help us, or at least remind us what to look for; the Clan, the Canton, and the City. The clan needs for the moment no explanation. The canton is the early community settled perhaps on the flat or sloping lands among the mountains, near the river, or in some place in the forest as far as they could fell the timber and hold the clearing against enemies or neighbours (they are the same thing, at first). In England the Saxons were the first pioneers in making these clearings in the forest; primitive man had not the tools to fell the trees. Afterwards, when houses in some sort of order give you streets, you have the village or hamlet, as you may prefer to call it, which will sometimes remain a village, but sometimes it grows to a town, or, larger still, to a city. "City", however, is a vague word, with different meanings in different ages and countries. Look at a map of modern London, and note the places whose names end in -gate, or in any town of Eastern England look for the church of St Botolph (the patron saint of travellers), and you will get some idea of the size of the town in old days. The first houses will be built somewhere near the river, so that the girls going to fetch water may not have too far to go, nor be cut off by robbers from neighbouring towns or by pirates from overseas. "Maiden Lane" in old New York tells the same tale. Besides the human beings the cattle will want water, too. The village will be built near

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[More information](#)

10

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

the ford, or on both sides of it, for the convenience of the tribe in crossing it, and to keep others off it. There is another advantage in having first the village, and then the town, on the ford; it will be some little way (or even more than a little way) up the river, and less liable to surprise by pirates. Three things, then, or four, fix the town on the River—the water-supply, the Road into the heart of the country, the shore Road (which needs the ford), and protection from trouble threatening from the sea.

Other things come into the story. Gold, for instance, is washed out of the rocks of the range, as they crumble, and is swept down into the river mud or gravel. But, widely spread as gold is over the world, there is not enough of it everywhere to make this very important. What matters more in a small land like Greece is that none of the rivers is navigable. In ancient France, as in Canada in the seventeenth century, much of the trade and travel was in boats up such rivers as the Rhone, the St Lawrence and the Ottawa, much further up than modern ships will go; for to-day the ships are bigger, and in some lands the rivers are silted up with mud. When you reached the head of the river, you “portaged”—that is, you carried your goods and your boat as best you could over to the head waters of another river and then paddled down that. A great deal of the trade between early Britain and the Mediterranean was carried on in this way, though, later on, the ingots of tin from Cornwall were packed on the backs of mules and went alongside the rivers instead of on them. But the Greek word for river tells its own story—*potamos*; the Greeks thought of a river as something above all to *drink*. If there was enough of it, the women would wash clothes in it, as we