# NEW SCHOOLS IN THE OLD WORLD

by

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*in collaboration with*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*My first debt of gratitude is to my wife—hers was the suggestion that resulted in this study; she cooperated throughout the study and helped in preparing the report. Florence Brett and Mabel Vogel, two of my teachers, accompanied us to most of the schools cited and visited many of the classes for me. The Winnetka Board of Education generously granted me leave of absence to visit European schools. The heads of all the schools visited were most helpful and gracious. Paola Molnorova of the Czechoslovak Junior Red Cross made our studies in her country possible and delightful. The introductions and credentials given me by the Honorable John Tigert, U. S. Commissioner of Education; the Honorable Francis G. Blair, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Illinois; and Professor Charles H. Judd of the University of Chicago, were of great value. Two or three of the chapters of this book appeared in a preliminary form in Progressive Education. I wish to express my appreciation to that magazine for permission to republish these chapters in book form.*

C. W.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CARLETON WASHBURNE, brought up from early childhood with the influence of John Dewey and Colonel Francis Parker permeating his home and school life, drifted accidentally into school teaching shortly after being graduated from Stanford University in 1912. In his first rural school, and then in a village school, he began experimenting with ways of developing each individual child. This brought him into contact with Dr. Frederic Burk, late president of the San Francisco State Teachers' College.

For five years he served on Burk's faculty, stimulated and inspired by Burk's dynamic thinking and personality. After completing his doctorate at the University of California he took the superintendency of the public school system in Winnetka, Illinois. These schools he transformed into an educational laboratory. The experiments carried forward there have become known around the world.

Not satisfied, however, with what he could observe and work out in his own schools, he secured leave of absence from Winnetka and made an extensive tour of European educational experiments, reporting back to the United States Bureau of Education.

In addition to running his schools, Dr. Washburne lectures widely, writes school textbooks of a new kind, conducts educational research, and gives summer courses in various universities.

MYRON STEARNS is a New Englander with Pacific coast leanings, having spent more than 15 years in California. He was graduated from Stanford University in 1906, expecting to become a lawyer; later, giving up law plans on account of defective eyesight, he traveled a good deal and gradually took up magazine writing. A chance meeting with Dr. Washburne while returning from Europe led to a friendship that resulted first in a rather extensive series of articles on education, published in *Collier's Weekly*, and, later, to the collaboration on this book.

## AN INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS

This book gives an account of the work being done in a dozen progressive schools scattered throughout Europe. At first glance it may seem quite simple—merely a series of brief sketches of what a few advanced schools abroad are doing. But if you *read each chapter in terms of your own child's schooling,* the descriptions become important. You will get the full import of the book, if, each time you find an account of the way in which some desirable quality is developed in the fortunate children who attend these schools, you note the difference between their ways of work and those of the school where your own child is studying. Each time there is a wide divergence—and you will find many—from the orthodox ways of American education, compare the two methods, and their results.

A new day is dawning in the educational world, a day in which the individual child is coming into his own. On the heights there are these schools that have caught the first glimpse of this new day.

The earliness of the dawn causes grotesque shadows to fall on some of these schools, and the

awakening in others is not yet complete. But below, in the valley where most of the world's schools are, night still reigns. It is not a night of slumber, but one of confused darkness. Here well-intentioned people, groping, do violence to little children. Here, because of the darkness, children are treated as though they were all alike.

They are crammed with dry facts. The inability to see their interests and desires, the inability to see their differences in mind and temperament, results in an effort to push them in herds and droves from one grade of the school to another. Too often they are compelled to learn like parrots, instead of being developed into finer human beings. Their abilities are neglected in order to give more time for mental drill—drill frequently distasteful, sometimes useless, and sometimes harmful. Sometimes they actually leave school less confident, less joyous, less able to think independently and meet successfully the problems of life, than if they had not gone at all.

To understand this situation, which to some appears in America to be approaching a crisis, we have to go back a few decades.

As long as America was to a great extent a pioneer country, formal education was still relatively unimportant. Knowledge came from the woods and fields, from the day's needs and the day's

work, from father and mother and older brother and sister or companion. School supplemented the education gained in the home and the great outdoors by training children in the "Three R's," in a few of the common essentials of knowledge, not so readily picked up at random, that would in later life prove to be necessary for success in any complicated social structure. For those who were to enter the professions, particularly the ministry, institutions of "Higher Learning" sprang up even in early Colonial days—the academies and first colleges. They leaned heavily on the formal requirements of the ministry, of law, and medicine —a knowledge of the classics, together with a smattering of the odds and ends of culture that we have since learned to classify vaguely under the head of "A Liberal Education," or "Liberal Arts." Then, gradually, the country developed. Cities grew like mushrooms. We stepped into an age of scientific development, a mechanical and industrial age of railroads and steamboats and electricity and factories, of automobiles and skyscrapers and quick communication by telegraph and telephone and radio. Above all this we developed a complicated superstructure of business, of new political and economic and social needs. We outgrew our schools.

At the same time we entered upon a great ex-

periment in universal education that was to meet the demands made upon coming generations by this new and infinitely complicated social structure. Schools increased in size, and became, seemingly at least, more and more important. School hours increased, and bit by bit the curriculum changed to meet the new economic demands.

But note: Early American schools, the ancestors, as it were, of our present educational system, were merely auxiliary. They supplemented the knowledge of life and the development of abilities gained *outside* the schoolroom with a certain advantageous minimum of formal learning. American schools to-day, to a far greater extent than our forefathers dreamed would ever be so, are being asked to prepare children *for life itself*.

It is true that American public schools have changed immeasurably in the last half century. But the educational needs of the children they serve have changed also, and even more rapidly. Formerly, in a great measure, initiative and independence, a sense of responsibility, character, and the ability to work and cooperate effectively, were developed outside of school. The Little Red School House contributed a working knowledge of the three R's, and, theoretically, a bit of training in self-control and application thrown in for good measure. To-day we look to schools to develop

character and the ability to think constructively and independently—and are shocked and disappointed when the inherited system of doling out facts in classrooms fails to accomplish those results.

In order to get new light, in order to get any possible assistance in solving these great problems that confront the modern school, of how to develop common sense and independence and creative ability and sympathetic understanding along with knowledge of fractions and the multiplication table and geographical locations, we need to study progressive schools and methods of the forward-looking educators of Europe, as well as of our own country.

Education is an international, as well as a national, problem. Human nature is pretty much the same the world over. If Madame Montessori in Italy finds new ways of letting children teach themselves, we want to know about it, and utilize the new knowledge in our own schools, for the benefit of our own children. If Decroly in Belgium goes a step beyond Montessori, in originating new materials and attaining greater flexibility of method in adapting the new instruction to individual children, we need to know of his work, too, and benefit by it. Already Montessori's teaching methods have made themselves felt from New

England to California; her name is a household word; but of Decroly's work we know far less. The work at Bedales suggests a new valuation of coeducation. We should know of it. Miss Mackinder's amazing work with children of the London slums illuminates the whole significant subject of self-instruction. Cousinet's success with group-instruction in France leads us to think of possibilities beyond anything that our own Project Method has yet achieved. We need to know about them all.

It is not with the common run of schools that this report deals. People who are struggling toward the light, who have seen just enough to realize the darkness with which they are surrounded, can do better by turning their eyes toward those schools where day is dawning.

It was to search out those schools beyond the range of the American experiments with which we were already familiar, to look at the new day of education through the eyes of the teachers in them, to watch the children as the new light begins to steal over them, that I left my own schools and, accompanied by my wife and two of my teachers, visited a number of experimental schools in Europe.

We found much of absorbing interest. The intensity of suffering which Europe has experienced

and the great changes resulting from the World War make Europe even more dissatisfied than we are in America with the schools that have turned out the present generation of adults.

There are a number of types of educational experiments in Europe; few, if any of them, are strictly scientific. Many of them are striving toward the fullest possible development of each individual child.

This book is not scholarly. It does not represent a scientific investigation. It does not attempt to evaluate the experiments it describes. We were not in any school long enough, and had neither the time nor the means, to make a critical study. It does not attempt to be comprehensive. We were searching for schools and experiments that would throw light on our particular problems, that would stimulate us to new thought and effort, rather than for material for any scientific treatise or comprehensive summary. Those who wish more detailed accounts may turn to such interesting and valuable books as *Bedales,* by J. H. Badley; *Individual Work in Infant Schools,* by Miss Jessie Mackinder; *The Decroly Method,* by A. Hamaide; *The Dalton Plan,* by Miss Helen Parkhurst; *The Dalton Laboratory Plan,* by Evelyn Dewey; *Saunderson of Oundle,* by H. G. Wells; or, to books of a more general nature, *The New Educa-*

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# CHAPTER I

*Modern Lights in Ancient Halls—Oundle*

ALL important types of experiments may be found in England developed to a greater or less degree. We are therefore glad that through visiting a number of experimental schools in England first we were able to have a glimpse of each kind of experiment that we were later to meet in the various countries on the continent. In England we found schools which boldly grafted the new on to the old, and these presented a rather incongruous appearance. We found schools which sought the fullest development of the individual child through a carefully balanced day with a wide range of activities, a reasonable amount of freedom and fine living conditions. We found a congested school in the poor part of London where little children were recognized as individuals even when one teacher had to handle forty-five or fifty of them, and we found a daring experiment up near Manchester where the teachers sought to develop each child by giving almost complete freedom.

The traditional secondary education for boys of the upper classes in England is in the so-called "Public School," which, of course, is very far

from public in the American sense of the word, being a high-priced boarding-school for the élite. Most of these Public Schools value tradition and athletics above all else in the world. The classic Latin and Greek are considered the only course for boys of ability, the "modern side," or course containing modern languages and science, being largely relegated to the dullards.

All this was gone over for me by the highly refined, genial, and scholarly head of one of the most ancient of the Public Schools. He and his viewpoint were very much like the assembly hall in which the boys were chanting their prayers in Latin. The original assembly hall had been built before the Norman Conquest, and some of the stones still remained from that day. The rest had all been built in the Middle Ages. It was dark, interesting for its antiquity and traditions, quite fascinating for an American on a short visit, but oppressive and gloomy to the extreme when considered as the dwelling-place of living twentieth-century boys.

But there is a Public School in England which is trying to break away, and has installed a modern electric lighting system in its educational concepts. The effect is a rather startling lighting up of the stone walls of tradition that remain at Oundle, not far from Northampton, but at least it is a lighting

up. This is the school which Mr. H. G. Wells chose from all England as the place to educate his own sons, and which he has so fully and eloquently described in his *Saunderson of Oundle.*

Recently, in America, the terms "horizontal ability" and "vertical ability" have been creeping into the educational vocabulary. They are awkward terms, but they serve to point a distinction of great importance to teachers and children alike, that is, bit by bit, becoming recognized. Psychologists speak of a child who has learned by rote, who can recite his memorized lessons glibly but is unable to apply the information they contain to facts of his own existence, as having "horizontal ability" only. On the other hand the child who can *do,* who can apply his knowledge to life, who is able to utilize his arithmetic in actual bookkeeping and his knowledge of physics and mechanics in repairing a motor, is spoken of as having "vertical ability" also. The difference between the two abilities is, roughly, the difference between knowing about automobiles from reading about them, and being able to drive a machine oneself or recognizing a particular make at a glance. It is the difference between knowing Latin for classroom purposes only and the ability to recognize a Latin root in an unfamiliar word encountered in an English novel and guess its meaning. In a sense it may