THE MOST IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT IN AMERICA

BY WM THURSTON BROWN

FERRER COLONY STELTON N J
Books on Education

The Origin and Ideals of the Modern School
by Francisco Ferrer

Why Men Fight
by Bertrand Russell

Democracy and Education
by John Dewey

Schools of Tomorrow
by John and Evelyn Dewey

Pedagogical Papers and the School at Yasnaya
Polyana
by Leo Tolstoy

Tolstoy As Schoolmaster
by Ernest Crosby

Misalliance, with a Preface on Parents and Children
by George Bernard Shaw

The Education of Children
by Michel Montaigne

Thoughts on Education
by John Locke

Emile, or Education
by Jean Jacques Rousseau

Education, Intellectual, Moral and Physical
by Herbert Spencer

Education (in Lectures and Biographical Sketches)
by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Child and Country
by Will Levington Comfort

A Dominie's Log
by A. S Neill

Concerning Children
by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

The Century of the Child
by Ellen Key

The Montessori Method
by Dr. Maria Montessori

The Tragedy of Education
by E. G. Holmes

Philistine and Genius
by Boris Sidis

The Training of the Human Plant
by Luther Burbank

My Little Boy
by Carl Ewald

Our Children
by Dr. Paul Carus
THE MOST IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT IN AMERICA BY WM THURSTON BROWN FERRER COLONY STELTON N J
THE MOST IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT IN AMERICA

By William Thurston Brown

FORTY miles southwest of New York City, on a farm of 140 acres, a mile and a half from Stelton station on the Pennsylvania Railroad, is a school for boys and girls which, in some respects, deserves to be called the most interesting and important educational experiment in America. This is a very sweeping claim to make, but it is made with deliberation, and this brochure is written for the purpose of giving the facts which warrant and support this claim.

First of all, what does this claim mean? It means simply that this school surpasses all others, not in equipment, not in endowment, not in prestige, but in certain qualities which the best thought of the world admits to be of supreme value. The Ferrer Modern School at Stelton, N. J., is insignificant in size compared with most other experimental schools, has no endowment at all, was founded by a group of wage-workers who are social idealists, has an inadequate teaching staff, and its entire material assets consist in an old farmhouse, a small dormitory, a barn, and ten acres of land. But the claim is here made that, judged even by the standards accepted by the foremost American educators—such as Prof. Dewey, Dr. Charles W. Eliot, Dr. Flexner, Mr. Wirt, and
the founders of the Francis Parker School in Chicago—judged by the standards which prompted the best of our other experimental schools—this little school at Stelton marks a distinct advance over any other children's school in America in the ideals which it sets for itself, in its fidelity to those ideals, and in the spiritual results of its work.

Education, be it remembered, is not at all a matter of finance, nor even a question of erudition—least of all a matter of prestige—it is the spiritual unfolding of human beings. It is free, courageous adventure into realms of fuller and richer living. Moreover, any school which depends on endowment or material support, especially from those who know nothing themselves of education, cannot be educational. In education, spiritual interests must at all times be paramount.

Prestige, numerical strength, and wealth have no spiritual significance. History has over and over again impressed this truth on the minds of men by object lessons of unmistakable import. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was the question asked two thousand years ago by learned and powerful contemporaries of a man whom four hundred millions of people today profess to regard as the supreme Superman of all history. Indeed, we are right now facing a marvellous object lesson of this truth in the titanic war that is testing all the political and social fabrics of the nations as never before. Think, Russia has long since ceased to figure in the mighty conflict on the battlefields of Europe. Her armies are disbanding. They no longer have any power. That is the inevitable outcome of a revolution begun and carried out by a mere handful of wage-workers. In no remote sense of the word is this a war between wage-workers. And yet the editors of the New Republic
Children and Teachers Enjoying An Outing at the Homes of Leonard D. Abbott and J. Wm. Lloyd
Westfield, N. J.
as late as November 17, 1917, in a survey of the world war, said:

"The Russian revolution constitutes by far the greatest net gain which the war has bestowed upon western civilization."

In other words, a mere handful of Russian wage-workers, for the most part uneducated in the schools of the nation, have produced perhaps the greatest gain to civilization in all history thus far. That is not a triumph of wealth, prestige, or power—it is a triumph of the human spirit.

The American public school system has been for two or three generations the boast of thousands of people in this country who have given no thought whatever to the fundamental problems of education—and of no others. It has been assumed by the unthinking and the reactionary that providing schools, books, teachers, and other material equipment for all the children of the nation on equal terms was establishing a system of education. That assumption is tragically false. The public school system has been and is democratic, to be sure, but to say that it has been or is, as a whole, educational, is a misuse of language. The famous Gary system, which is now spreading among the public schools, is the frankest and most emphatic condemnation of the public school system. If the Gary schools are educational, the un-Garyized public schools—which include the vast majority—are not.

Perhaps one of the most interesting facts about the various educational experiments now being undertaken in this country is this: that they all give as the reason for their existence the failure and incapacity of the public schools, as now organized and conducted, to do the work of education. One of the most widely known experimental schools in this country is the Francis Parker School of Chicago. One of the first statements in the prospectus which gives its reason
for being is this: “It is safe to say that the moving power toward the establishment of this School was the belief that the current general process in the education of our youth contains much waste of the inner human values which we sum up in the word character—that it squanders much of the best for the sake of the attainment of the less good—that the prime aim of a real education must be to conserve and develop these finer values—and that the usual educational institution is so hampered by the weight of ignorant demand and blind conservatism that is laid upon it by a dominating public that where it would, it seldom can be free to take such steps as might even seem very sure ones toward a better education.”

In other words, the Francis Parker School was founded solely because the public school system was not and is not educational.

The same thing is equally true of every other educational experiment. Why is it, for example, that the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation has undertaken to install in New York City what it calls a “Modern School”—using the very title that Francisco Ferrer gave to his revolutionary schools in Spain? Because the men of that Board see that the public schools are not educational. And why are they not? Let Dr. Flexner, the head of the General Education Board, answer. In his little brochure on “A Modern School” he says:

“ Tradition still too largely determines both the substance and the purpose of current education. A certain amount of readjustment has indeed taken place; in some respects almost frantic efforts are making to force this or that modern subject into the course of study. But traditional methods and purposes are strong enough to maintain most of the traditional curriculum and to confuse the handling of material introduced in response to the pressure of the modern spirit.
Group of Children and Teachers at Play
It is therefore still true that the bulk of the time and energy of our children at school is devoted to formal work developed by schoolmasters without close or constant reference to genuine individual or social need. The subjects in question deal predominantly with words or abstractions remote from experience; and they continue to be acquired by children because the race has formed the habit of acquiring them, or, more accurately, the habit of going through the form of acquiring them, RATHER THAN BECAUSE THEY SERVE THE REAL PURPOSES OF PERSONS LIVING TODAY. Generally speaking, it may be safely affirmed that the subjects commonly taught, the time at which they are taught, the manner in which they are taught, and the amounts taught ARE DETERMINED BY TRADITION, NOT BY A FREE AND UNTRAMMELED CONSIDERATION OF LIVING AND PRESENT NEEDS.”

What do these statements mean? They mean that the public school system today is merely a tradition, something handed down to us from the past. That is to say, we have this school system, not because we have created it—for we have not—not because we need it—for we need something profoundly different from it in almost every way—but because generations now dead, who knew nothing whatever of today’s needs and not much of their own, created and bequeathed this system to us.

Furthermore, the public school system is not now and never has been an educational experiment—it has been a tradition from the beginning. That is its most serious indictment, as it is of anything that belongs to the life of man, for education must be experimental. Life itself is supremely an experiment, and he who knows nothing of experiment and adventure, morally, ethically, spiritually, knows nothing of life. He merely vegetates at best.
The one hopeful thing in the sphere of education in America is the fact that there are educational experiments here. The three most famous are the Francis Parker School in Chicago, the Gary schools at Gary, Indiana, and the "Modern School" established by the General Education Board in Teachers' College, New York City. The prospectus of the Francis Parker School is an inspiring document, and the school has an income of more than half a million dollars a year. The Gary schools have the resources of a city behind them, and the Modern School in New York is supported by the ten or twenty millions of the Rockefeller Foundation.

But the primary question of education is not: How much money has your school? It is, rather: What does it stand for? What does it propose to do? Can it do what it proposes to do? What is it doing now? What are its fruits? Better still: What is education, and what makes a school educational? Let us consider these questions first in relations to these other experimental schools, and then in relation to the Ferrer Modern School. For these are exactly the questions which led to the founding of the Francis Parker School, which prompted William Wirt to introduce methods and principles at Bluffton and Gary unknown to the bulk of the public schools, and which has caused the institution of the Modern School by the General Education Board in New York.

The most potent motive in the formation of the Francis Parker School, as stated in its prospectus, was the social motive. And the same thing is true of most, if not all, of the other experimental schools. Many of the ideals and motives underlying all these advanced schools, including the Ferrer Modern School, may be stated in the exact terms of the Francis Parker School prospectus. "We believe," says that prospectus, "that self-actuated work causes the greatest
Boarding House with Children's Dormitory in the Background
At Stelton
gain to the pupil; that training in initiative is a child's great need; that in his own interests we often find educative opportunity; that freedom, with a balancing responsibility, is the best condition of moral and intellectual growth; that real experience with actual material is an essential of learning; that opportunity for varied expression is necessary to right education; that for purposes of development children must be treated as individuals and not as a group; that one of the most effective and wholesome motives of work is the social motive."

What do the founders and teachers of the Parker School mean by the social motive? Let the prospectus answer: "Its establishment as an impulse in school makes of work there a real and worthy thing, converts school activities into earnest living, creates and trains for mature society the sine qua non of its existence—people of social conscience and social power. Nor does the social motive here mean a consciously philanthropic purpose, but rather a feeling that one does not and cannot work alone; that whatever one does is a single unit of a large pattern that is being built by many contributors. But school work today is not training young men and young women for social service. They know nothing of the happiness that is rooted in useful service. The schools and the homes in which there are no social responsibilities and duties, produce the snobs, the burdens, and the parasites of society."

This prospectus then asks: "What is the remedy for all this waste and failure? Here is its answer. Note this answer carefully, and think whether it implies any clear or well-defined knowledge of the problem involved. "It is true," says the prospectus, "that the school cannot reproduce the complex conditions of society. It should not fit for any precise set of social conditions, but we believe that it should attempt to
train in every child the habits, tastes and qualities which society will always need: self-command, resourcefulness, power of independent thinking, fine discrimination, whole-hearted love of labor, the habit of sharing activity with one's fellows for the benefit of all."

The following quotations are from Francis Parker himself: "Community life is the ideal of education, because it is the only ideal great enough to provide for the all-sided development of the individual. Community life is that state of society in which every individual member orders his conduct with reference to the good of the whole; the whole being so constituted as to necessitate the highest development of its members." And the prospectus adds that "in his maturity the individual sustains to the complex society of which he is a part, relations which are foreshadowed in his relations to his school and to his playmates."

Now, what is the matter with these statements quoted from the prospectus of what is generally regarded as one of the most advanced schools in America? The fatal defect in these statements lies in the fact that there was not in them and is not behind them any adequate or true conception of what the fabric of our social life is. A single sentence—the last one quoted—will show this to be true. Does the individual "in his maturity sustain to the complex society of which he is a part relations which are foreshadowed in his relations to his school and his playmates"? NOTHING COULD BE FARTHER FROM THE TRUTH. The mature individual in society does not sustain relations either to other individuals or to the society of which he is a part remotely resembling those which he sustains in any school that exists in America. In any of these schools, all the children are on a level of social equality and of economic equality: they have exactly the same rights
and the same opportunities IN THE SCHOOL. In the school they are all members of a perfect democracy, so far as their relations to one another are concerned. But in society as it exists in America today, and as it has existed for a hundred years or more, the whole fabric of human relationship is radically different. Some individuals are employes, and others are employers. Some are virtually slaves, and others are virtually masters. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE UNITED STATES WHO ARE OBLIGED FREQUENTLY TO CHANGE THEIR NAMES IN ORDER TO SECURE EMPLOYMENT AND THE CHANCE TO LIVE AND SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES. This in a so-called democracy. That person is inexcusable and incompetent to perform fundamentally educational work in America today who does not know that such statements as these, which are basic to the Francis Parker School, are not true to the facts. The facts are widely different. The statements in that prospectus—or many of them—are utopian, not realistic—they spring from sentimentalism, not from knowledge of the modern world.

Do you think the Francis Parker School is a school for a democracy? Why, it is a school of the well-to-do, by the well-to-do, and for the well-to-do, and for that very reason it is idle to suppose it can satisfy the demands of modern education. Many things in its technique are fine. Its tragic failure is on the ethical and spiritual side, which is about all there is to education by its own confession. Said one of the oldest members of its staff to the writer of this brochure less than two years ago: “We have been in existence for sixteen years, and we have hardly begun to practice the principles of this prospectus.” Why not? Perhaps an incident will answer. The teacher of civics and economics in 1916 was a graduate of the Parker
School and of Vassar. Inspired by the ideals of the prospectus, she tried to introduce as a text-book in her class Prof. Charles A. Beard's splendid work, "American Citizenship," the one book published in America that is suited at all to the ideals *professed* by the Francis Parker School. But she found her pupils were not interested in that book, and so she had substituted a conventional text-book on Political Economy as *inadequate to the purpose as a text-book on alchemy* would be for the teaching of modern chemistry. Why did she consent to teach things which she herself knew to be out of date and untrue? Because all her pupils come from homes *whose whole economic life is based on an undemocratic and exploiting system of industry*. Those boys and girls have nothing in their own home environment, and nothing in their school environment, that affords any motive to interest in a fundamental and searching study of social and political evolution. What is the result? This: that the Francis Parker School will never teach economics or any other *social or political* subject in accordance with the demands of facts and human need today.

Did the mediæval church teach the Copernican astronomy? On the contrary, that church *kept the writings of Copernicus under the ecclesiastical ban for nearly or quite three centuries after his death*. Why? Because the mediæval church was vitally interested in maintaining a view of the universe based on the bible, and not on facts as proved by the telescope and exact science. No institution which is materially or morally interested in maintaining any fixed theory can be educational. Is it conceivable that the Rockefeller Modern School in New York will ever teach any principles of economics which condemn the methods by which its founder got his wealth?
Well, what of the Gary Schools? Let it be frankly said that the Gary schools under the supervision of Mr. Wirt are not only a vast improvement on the ordinary public schools, but in some ways distinctly superior to the Francis Parker School. They are far more democratic than the Parker School, which is vital. Mr. Wirt has performed a service of far-reaching value, and all will heartily acknowledge it. The Modern School in New York will also perform important service, as will all the experimental schools. Nevertheless, in certain respects that are vital and fundamental to the demands of education and to the deepest needs of individual and social life, the Ferrer Modern School, even if it should never have a suitable plant, is a more interesting and far more vital educational experiment than either. Let us see how and why this is true.

The ground upon which Dr. Flexner condemns the public school system is that the substance and method of its teaching are determined by tradition, and not by the living needs of individuals and society. "A man educated in the modern sense," he says, "will be contentedly ignorant of things for learning which no better reason than tradition can be assigned. Instead, his education will be obtained from studies that serve a real purpose. Its content, spirit and aim will be realistic and genuine, not formal or traditional. He will be trained to know, to care about, and to understand the world he lives in, both the physical world and the social world. A firm grasp of the physical world means the capacity to note and interpret phenomena; a firm grasp of the social world means a comprehension of and sympathy with current industry, current science, and current politics."

In other words, not tradition, but fact, truth, life, the current developments of society—these must determine education. To put it another way, education must produce an effective citizenship. The same prin-
ciple is implicit in the theory of Mr. Wirt's schools. And effective citizenship the public schools have no capacity to produce, on their present basis of procedure.

But Mr. Wirt's system is just as open to Dr. Flexner's condemnation in one or two particulars as any other public school. For Mr. Wirt, as quoted in Randolph Bourne's enthusiastic but uncritical book on "The Gary Schools," says this: "In my judgment, opportunities for religious instruction are good things for children." That is to say, Mr. Wirt approves the process which we know as religious instruction and provides amply for it in his scheme. And of course, he believes in teaching a formal patriotism to the children. But both these practices violate not only the very principles of education which created the Gary Schools and prompted the Rockefeller Modern School, but also the very idea of education, and are a hindrance to effective citizenship as defined by the manifest needs of today and the well-authenticated truths of science. A moment's thought will convince any unbiased person of this.

Submit the question of religious instruction to the principle stated by Dr. Flexner, and practiced by Mr. Wirt in all that makes his schools a gain for education. The principle is this: not tradition, but the present needs of the individual and of society must determine what to teach and how and when and where. But no religious instruction is or will be given to the children of the Gary schools by the churches of that city except as a tradition and on the authority of tradition. No one knows that better than Mr. Wirt. Religion is nowhere being taught to children because the known and felt needs of personal or social life require that it be taught. Churches teach religion as a tradition, and because it is a tradition. The churches themselves are a tradition, and nothing more. If we
had none of these churches, and none of these church officials—priests, clergymen, bishops, popes and the like—we never could create them. They were all created by social conditions and intellectual conceptions long ago outgrown and discarded in political and social life. They all root in the past, in tradition, and many of them in ignorance, in fear, in savagery. To paraphrase Dr. Flexner's incisive criticism, these things "continue to be acquired by children, if at all, because the race has formed the habit of acquiring them, or, more accurately, the habit of going through the form of acquiring them, rather than because they serve the real purposes of persons living today." For any school to provide that sort of thing for boys or girls is a violation of sound educational principles, and will as surely sometime be so regarded as the burning of heretics and the hanging of witches have gone out of fashion.

Why did Mr. Wirt introduce manual and art training into the curriculum of his schools? Did tradition prompt him to? Certainly not. Tradition was against it. He did it in spite of tradition and against tradition, because he saw that the life of his pupils and the interest of society require these things. Does he favor religious instruction for the same reason? Not at all. If he or anyone else should say: "Every life needs the sense of the sublime, needs reverence for what is noble and true, needs aspiration, needs worship, needs the sense of beauty, needs the feeling of immortal values, needs the consciousness of a unity and worth and power in the universe that gives value and purpose and satisfaction to life which can be derived from no other source," we might answer: "True, but religious instruction does not and cannot impart these things, never did impart these things. Some religious persons may have had these qualities, and as many who are not called religious at all have had them—but they had
them, not as a result of religious instruction, but because of ethical personal and social experience. *They should be gained in the same way now.* Would you teach reverence to children? *Then let them see something capable of evoking reverence from them.* Hundreds of thousands of children, and adults as well, never see anything and have no chance of seeing anything of that nature. Would you awaken aspiration in children? *Then set before them possibilities capable of inspiring that feeling.* Do you want them to worship? *Don't think you can teach that by giving them a creed or a ritual.* That is a violation of every principle, not only of education, but of honesty and candor. And the most it can do is to make them bigots or hypocrites or dolts, or all three. *They will really worship, when and only when, they find something which can produce in them the feeling of worship.* If you try to make them think that anything else is worship, you are trying to perpetrate a fraud on them. Would you have the children of your homes or the children of the nation acquire a genuine sense of unity and value and kindly power in the universe such as will give worth and meaning and purpose to their living? *Then organize the world of which they are a part upon such a basis of justice, freedom and fraternity, that the whole force of social life and progress shall mirror these things which you hold to be true."

While you are about it, ask yourself whether either the public schools or these richly endowed experimental schools are doing or even trying to do any of these things.

The Ferrer Modern School does not object to religion—it objects to a fraud and a sham masquerading under the name of religion. If I have correctly defined religion above, there is nothing in all the range of human possibility which the Ferrer Modern School desires so profoundly to give to children as their su-
preme right, and the school is organized primarily with such an end in view. In the name of science, in the name of human lives, in the name of the integrity of the human mind, in the name of all that is best and most sacred in life, we protest against and reject the attempt widely made to offer counterfeits instead of the real thing—which describes the whole attitude of traditional religion the world over. There is more, a hundred fold more, of religious instruction being given to children without any thought of religion at all, than the whole bulk of formal religious instruction.

Both Mr. Wirt and Dr. Flexner would doubtless defend the teaching of patriotism and the mere formal salute to the flag and verbal swearing allegiance to the government as a means to good citizenship. And most people agree with them. They agree with them because they have given no serious thought to what is involved in that senseless and harmful process. It should require little thought to convince unbiassed, intelligent people that such a procedure is wrong. There isn’t any connection whatever between patriotism and that silly practice. Who were the patriots of the American Colonies during the ten or twenty years preceding the Revolutionary War, and how did they become so? Did Washington and Jefferson and Adams and Otis and Franklin and Thomas Paine become patriots by daily saluting the flag of the existing government and swearing eternal allegiance to it? Who is the one man in all Germany today whom every American of intelligence regards as the noblest, bravest, most useful man in the empire? Is it Kaiser William, who is the incarnation of exactly the sort of patriotism which our public schools are trying to foster? Or is it Karl Liebknecht—the one man in Germany who dared challenge and deny the justice and truth of his own government—the one man in Germany who is not patriotic? Who are the people in Germany and Austria and Bul-
garia and Turkey who, in the opinion of most Americans, are the worst citizens of those countries? Their most partisan patriots—the men in those countries who are exactly what our schools are trying to make of our nation’s children.

The truth is, the training of our public school system, so far as patriotism is concerned, is an unintelligent aping of Prussianism and nothing else. It is an evasion of the most fundamental moral and ethical obligation any nation can have, any government can know. Namely, the obligation to make the laws and conditions of life in the nation such, that all its citizens, from the youths in the schools to the graybeards in their homes, will defend it instantly with their lives, if need be. We are trying in our public school system to make manikins and parrots out of our children, and then expect them on that account to be good citizens. Do parrots and manikins make good or effective citizens? They make nothing but easy marks for corrupt politicians and scheming bosses and slave-drivers. They are not worthy to be called citizens. In proportion as one’s words or actions become mechanical and not the expression of clear thought and deep feeling, in that proportion does it mean the atrophy of manhood and womanhood, the debasing of life.

The Ferrer Modern School has as its supreme purpose the training of children for alert and effective citizenship—yes, for the only thing worthy to be called patriotism. Such a school as ours would not be tolerated in Turkey or Austria or Germany or Japan or Spain. Why? Because its course of study cannot produce citizens who will respect or support or defend the ideals or the institutions of those countries. Its study and training will produce citizens who demand and can help create laws and institutions which flower from justice and intelligence and love of freedom. Any nation which cannot tolerate that kind of school
founded this nation, but not of the men who have so completely obscured the principles and purposes which alone gave it inspiring significance.

Naturally, the school such men have founded stands clearly for libertarian ideals and methods in education. Seen from another point of view, the whole purpose and method of the school may be described as "liberating." Its social goal, like that of all the world's forward-looking men, is the fullest possible freedom for every human being. Boys and girls in this school develop their capabilities in an atmosphere of freedom, and by the exercise of freedom, with its balancing responsibility. With this in view, the school has been placed in the midst of a community of people taking the name of "Ferrer Colony"—named in honor of the noble Spanish educator who was murdered by the tradition-worshipping Spanish government in 1909 on charges which that same government afterward officially declared to be false. This colony is not a commune, but is made up of working people, most of whom believe and practice principles of freedom and have discarded religious and political superstitions. Thus, the school has about it a social environment free from prejudice and charged with an ennobling ideal.

Most of the children live together as a family with teachers and caretakers. Living in this way, they of necessity acquire the social virtues of industry, co-operation, mutual respect, justice, patience, honesty, truthfulness, and responsibility. These social qualities arise naturally and inevitably, not from rules laid down in a book or from authority exercised by a master, but from the experience of co-operative living. The ideal of the school is that the children's life shall be their education. And life in any society that may ever exist must include work as well as play, responsi-
confesses its own essential injustice and wrong, no matter what its name may be. If a nation desires or expects schools that are worthy of the name, that prefer truth to falsehood, that put justice above injustice, and that are capable of training a worthy citizenship, the nation itself must rest, in all its institutions and all its deeds, not upon ancient traditions however revered, but upon the needs and aspirations of living men and women. And whether the nation has such a foundation or not, the only school that can train boys and girls for a worthy citizenship is the school that trains its boys and girls for service in creating a just and freedom-loving society.

The Vital Questions

The questions which determine the educational value of a school, as already said, are these: What does the school propose to do, and how and why? Can it do what it proposes? And what are its fruits? Let us consider these questions now in relation to the Ferrer Modern School.

I. What does the Ferrer School propose to do, and why and how? The Ferrer School was founded by radical thinkers, by social idealists, practically all of them wage-workers, some of them identified for years with the struggle of the Russian people against a humiliating and enslaving autocracy and toward a liberty untainted by hypocrisy. The school is simply the flower of the best intelligence and the loftiest idealism of the radical movement in America. The highest purpose of the school is citizenship. But by citizenship its founders do not mean the mechanical acceptance of existing customs and institutions which now marks the public school system and proves it to be morally and educationally sterile. By citizenship the founders of the school mean fitness and capacity for creating better forms of social existence and higher standards of personal life. The founders of this school were and are spiritual kindred of the men who
bility as well as freedom, hard things as well as easy, social co-operation and dependableness as well as personal initiative and individualism.

There isn't an intelligent serious-minded father or mother in America who would not rather a son or daughter should gain education under such conditions than under any others that can be named.

The conditions of life in this school are these: The school has no endowment, an uncertain income, and meager equipment. Its needs are great and pressing. It has ten acres of land, some of it containing clay suitable for pottery, a farmhouse, a dormitory capable of housing twenty children, and a barn. The fees charged are only sufficient to pay the bare cost of board, fifty cents a week for tuition, and, with twenty children, $10 a week each to the three care-takers. An entrance fee of $25, and $5 per week from parents for each child, have thus far availed for the above purposes. Provision for those who supervise the work, arrange programs and act as teachers has to be made by appeal to radicals everywhere. The Modern School Association of North America, the body which is responsible for the management of the school, is soon to be incorporated so as to be able legally to receive gifts and bequests by will or otherwise. Membership in the Association may be had by any one upon the payment of $3, and every member receives the magazine published by the school during the term of membership.

The immediate tasks facing the school are the development of such resources as we have, the erection of a building for school purposes, and the securing of a regular income. On another page of this brochure will be found a plan for a building prepared and submitted by Mr. W. E. Jackson, of Philadelphia.

In most of the tasks of the school, the children share. They take part in the care of the dormitory
and boarding house, in the preparation and serving of the food, in the cultivation of the garden, in the beautifying of the grounds, in fashioning the clay into articles of use and beauty. Weaving is another form of activity soon to be introduced. Simple carpentry has been taught the children by a member of the colony. The setting of type and the printing of a little magazine, all of whose contents were contributed by the children, were other forms of their activity. Education through varied creative work and play—this is the fundamental ideal.

So far as possible, all intellectual employment is related to actual work and play—in the lower groups almost wholly so. A curriculum of course presupposes some perspective on the part of the teachers. Those responsible for a school must decide in a measure what qualities or achievements on the part of the pupils will justify the existence of the school. Without desiring or attempting to interfere with the free individual development of each child, we believe a school justifies itself if its pupils at the end of eight or ten years possess:

1. Vigorous bodily health and symmetrical physical development.

2. Minds free from superstition and having the point of view of science.

3. The power of intellectual concentration and personal initiative, and capacity for fruitful cooperation.

4. A systematic and vital knowledge of at least the elements of those subjects a knowledge of which is necessary to success in the struggle for existence.

5. An ethical consciousness which may be described in the phrase of Ferrer: “No rights without duties, and no duties without rights.”

6. Such sense of creative art and idealism as they are capable of.
7. Accurate and dynamic knowledge of the origin and value of existing social institutions, and of those movements in behalf of social improvement which give greatest significance to human life.

The possession of these qualifications by boys and girls as they reach the age of 14 or 15 we believe to be the best preparation for the years that follow.

In addition to the subjects taught in the ordinary grammar schools, the curriculum of the Ferrer Modern School includes Elementary Sociology, Origin and History of Religion, Ethics, Social Economics, History and Structure of the Labor Movement, Sex Physiology, Handicrafts, Agriculture, Clay Modelling, Printing, Weaving, and the Elements of Evolutionary Science applied to the things they can understand. Much more than this will be included as conditions become favorable. The ideal of the curriculum is the most varied life and activity possible.

The libertarian school abolishes the whole atmosphere of the ordinary class room and substitutes the atmosphere of a community home and workshop where children and teachers live and work together in close comradeship.

Authority does not exist in this school. Every child is as free as the teacher, and knows it. The only discipline is self-discipline on the part of every member of the school, and such social discipline as life in a family of equals naturally produces.

Every subject taught is related, so far as circumstances permit, to the life of the pupil or to things that command his interest. Thus, the teaching of Physiology and Hygiene has immediate relation to the health and physical development of the child and the sanitation of the school. The incentive of the most vital literature or of some personal interest or study stimulates his reading. The fields and woods and streams in the four seasons make Nature Study a
delight. The daily preparation and serving of food affords opportunity for learning Domestic Science, the school garden and orchard make Agriculture a necessity, and the beautifying of the grounds give play to artistic taste. Clay modelling and weaving call forth the creative instinct. The claims of his own body and the relationships of the school home give concrete meaning to Ethics, and readings and talks on Evolutionary Science enlighten him as to the origin and value of personal conduct and social institutions.

II. Can this school do what it proposes? It should not be difficult for any one to understand that the Ferrer School is incomparably freer and more capable of carrying out the most essential things in its program than any other school in America. Why? First, because this is a school established solely by members of that class in society which has no regard for tradition, and no interest in keeping things as they are—that is, in social and political stagnation—and great interest in social change in the direction of an enlarged freedom and a wider opportunity for all. They are of the same class as created and consummated the Russian revolution. No other school in America has been established by people of such social vision, or such liberating power. Second, all the patrons of the school desire the complete fulfillment of the school's program. None others will send their children here. Third, the teachers in this school are not interested primarily in their wages, which are very meager, but are here solely because of their whole-hearted devotion to the ideals and objects of the school. That is to say, this school fulfills the highest ideals of the teaching profession. Fourth, in spite of the poverty of equipment and the hardships incident to lack of adequate means, the pupils of this school would not willingly exchange it for any other on earth. Education in this
environment means to them not only life, but joy, expression, the expansion of every faculty of their natures.

The Proofs III. What are the fruits of this school? When it is remembered that this school has been in existence only six years, and only two years at Stelton, it will not be expected that very definite results can be offered. But there has recently come an opportunity to see the products of this libertarian school side by side with the products of other schools. Owing to the lack of teachers, it was decided in the summer of 1917 not to include the High School grade of work in our curriculum at present. Two of our pupils therefore were obliged, much against their inclination, to enter a conventional High School—which they did in a nearby city of 40,000 population. The fathers of these two children are cigar-makers by trade, wage-workers. These two children have come from working-class homes. Many of their classmates in High School are from well-to-do homes. What is the standing in their class of these two products of a libertarian school?

They have profoundly impressed their teachers, so marked is their fineness of spirit and clearness of mind. They represent a maturity of character which the ordinary school cannot and does not produce. And yet, they are in no respect prodigies—they are something infinitely better than prodigies—they are the products of libertarian methods and ideals. And they have been a revelation to their teachers. Said one teacher: “If the Modern School turns out such girls as these, the more of such schools we have, the better.”

The writer of this brochure has had experience in teaching children for forty years, but in all that time he has never been associated with girls and boys who were intellectually and in ethical perception, fineness of spirit, and moral fiber the equal of these products of the Ferrer Modern School. In a very short period
and with an equipment pitifully inferior to that of any other educational experiment in America, this school has already proved beyond doubt or question to any unbiased person the correctness of its ideals and the efficiency of its methods. Of all schools in America, surely this school is the most genuinely deserving of support from every forward-looking man and woman—from every man or woman who desires to see the enlargement of the boundaries of human liberty and the liberation of the human mind from every sort of superstition. We therefore appeal with confidence to all who believe in the need of a finer and more efficient citizenship, to all men and women of vision and hope and idealism, not for such endowments as other schools possess, not even for funds which other schools regard as indispensable to their existence and without which they are not begun, but only for sufficient help to enable this school the better to utilize its resources and to open the door of opportunity to other children that are seeking admission. There is no place between the oceans where a moderate amount of money will go so far or produce such splendid results as in the Ferrer Modern School at Stelton.

From whom must the help come for the maintenance of such a school as this? It cannot come from any whose faces are toward the past, from any who would perpetuate the chains of custom and creed and industrial bondage. It is only those whose hearts are still young, those who see life ahead of them, those who have courage and faith and undying hope—it is only they who will maintain such a school as this. And to every man and woman of that kind, this school is an investment, a song of cheer to the generations to come, a revolutionary deed that shall quicken the pulses of the world.

Our most pressing needs are these: First, a school building suited at once to symbolize and to facilitate
the school’s activities; second, an increase in our equipment; third, the addition of one or two to our teaching staff; and fourth, a regular income of four or five thousand dollars a year. With a small school building, a fair equipment, a teaching staff of four or five competent persons, and a moderate income, this school can become an educational beacon for America and the world. A building will cost from $10,000 to $20,000. In what other way can the investment of that amount of money pay such dividends as in housing a libertarian school?

You can help the school—

1. By becoming a member of the Modern School Association of North America. The membership fee is $3 a year and includes a year’s subscription to the magazine published by the Association—"The Modern School." You can also ask your friends to join the Association.

2. By interesting your Union or other organization in it and by securing an annual appropriation from it for the support of the school. Any Union or other body may become affiliated with the Association by paying $10.00 a year to the school.

3. By establishing scholarships at the school, so that children of comrades who have died or who have become incapacitated may enjoy the advantages of the school. Such scholarships would amount to $300 a year.

4. By regular monthly, quarterly, or annual contributions of larger amounts than the membership fee, where possible.

5. By contributions toward an endowment fund enabling the school to enlarge its capacity and provide for a larger number of children.

All contributions should be sent to The Modern School Association of North America, Stelton, New Jersey, and their receipt will be acknowledged at once.
The Modern School

by

Carl Zigrosser

Designs by

Rockwell Kent

The First of the Modern School Pamphlets

Fifteen Cents

Ferrer Colony, Stelton, N. J.
The Modern School

A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Libertarian Ideas in Education

The Modern School aims to survey the entire field of radical education in an impartial and constructive way. It is essentially critical of the ordinary school. It seeks to examine it both as regards broad principle and as regards specific detail, in order that scientific data may be furnished regarding the failure of the ordinary school. But wherever possible, it attempts to offer counter-suggestions of a positive and constructive nature.

It stands for the rights of children. It is deeply concerned with freedom and the cultivation of individuality. It aims to preserve a true balance between individual and social forces.

It believes in education for the masses. It seeks to discover what education means to the disfranchised worker, and what it might mean. It seeks to equalize society's opportunities for training and culture.

Edited by Carl Zigrosser and Published by The Modern School Association of North America at the Ferrer Colony, Stelton, N. J.

Ten Cents a Copy One Dollar a Year