

# THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOL

BY NEWTON DENT

THE BILLION-DOLLAR SCHOOL SYSTEM THAT IS EDUCATING EIGHTEEN MILLION AMERICAN BOYS AND GIRLS—ITS VAST COST AND EXTENT, ITS COMPLETENESS, AND SOME OF ITS PECULIAR FEATURES

OUR public school is only a single American institution—nothing more. Yet, as we shall see, a simple description of its greatness reads like the story of an empire. In fact, if the realm of Schoolville, United States, were a country in itself, it would rival France in area and Spain in population. It would be almost as rich as Hungary in its revenues. And in the character and efficiency of its public officials, it would be unsurpassed by any country in the world.

To be more exact, our public school season begins this month with more than eighteen millions of pupils, taking their seats in two hundred and sixty thousand buildings, under the instruction of four hundred and sixty thousand teachers, and at an expense of two hundred and sixty million dollars a year. The present value of our schoolhouses is more than seven hundred millions; and if we add to this the selling price of all the school lands, we shall find that the American public school is pretty nearly a billion-dollar institution—the largest and richest of all educational systems, either of to-day or of any former period in human history.

Uncle Sam is certainly proud of his youngsters. He is bent on giving them the best education that his money can buy. He spends more on his schools than he does on his army and navy. In Asia, a skilled workman seldom gets more than fifteen cents a day in wages; yet Uncle Sam gives slightly more than this for every day's instruction of every boy and girl under his flag. All told,

the liberal old gentleman who wears stars on his hat and stripes on his trousers pays a school bill of five thousand dollars a minute, and feels satisfied that he gets good value for the money.

In spite of the unparalleled sums of money which have been given to our universities in recent years, the United States is still a public school country. Half of the boys and girls are done with school at fifteen and begin to earn their own living. At seventeen only one out of four is left at his books. And while the aforesaid Uncle Sam has a standing offer of sixteen years' free education to any American child that demands it, it is still a fact that few take complete advantage of his generosity.

Roughly speaking, the average full-grown American has had a thousand days of schooling. This is twelve times as much as the average of a hundred years ago. It is an evidence of amazing progress. But it is not long enough to make college degrees a drug on the market. It is almost as true to-day as it ever was that the primary school is the greatest of all influences in developing the abilities and molding the character of the American people.

## THE CHIEF AMERICAN INDUSTRY

"Education has been the chief industry of the United States." So said Joseph Choate on one occasion before the professors of a British university. This, of course, was set down as a humorous exaggeration. But he might easily have defended his boast, had he chosen to do so, by drawing a comparison

between the schools of America and those of Europe. For instance, he might have shown that the yearly cost of the schools of New York City is much more than the annual revenue of either Switzerland or Denmark, and that the United States spends as much for education as all the nations of Europe combined.

He might have told the story—almost incredible to Europeans—of the multi-millionaire school systems of the Western States—of Texas, Utah, Washington, Michigan, and Minnesota, which shower upon childhood the wealth that foreign countries lavish upon royalty. Each one of these five States has endowed its schools with vast tracts of land that yield an income of from one to three millions a year. Some of the richest iron mines of Lake Superior—those wonderful mines where a fifty-ton car is loaded in five minutes by steam-shovels—pay a royalty of twenty-five cents a ton to education. Every swing of the great shovel puts a dollar and a quarter into the school fund.

It is said that the public school is not a new idea—that Herodotus, for example, was educated in a free school in the city of Thurii. But neither Herodotus nor any other scholar of ancient times ever dreamed of such schools as those that stand in our larger American cities. The whole population of Thurii, very likely, could be housed in Number Sixty-Two or Number One Hundred and Eighty-Eight—the two biggest schools in New York. These two immense palaces of education contain two hundred and fifty teachers and ten thousand pupils. They would shelter a dozen regiments of United States infantry. Each contains an auditorium as large as an average theater, and in round numbers, each cost a million dollars to build.

#### WHAT AMERICAN SCHOOLS TEACH

As to the information that is dispensed in these great universities of childhood, it is, in many respects, far beyond anything that was taught in the most illustrious halls of learning in the days of Herodotus and Thurii. Instead of the "three R's," we have now nineteen different branches of knowledge. Our little twelve-year-old Ameri-

cans are given a higher course in science and hygiene than the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge received less than a century ago. They learn more about the Constitution of the United States than many a lawyer knew in the early period of the republic. They are taught to sing, to sew, to cook, and to know much about the long story of the human race.

What would a pedagogue of long ago think of a school in which boys were taught to whittle, to fish, to cobble shoes, to weave, to plant radishes and potatoes, and to hammer iron into shape on little anvils? What would he think of a school in which girls learned to wash, dust, prepare meals, and take care of babies? Yet in the vacation schools of the past summer there have been twelve hundred teachers giving just such instruction to the children of our overcrowded cities.

All manner of innovations have been introduced to make life more worth while for the children of the tenements, who have not inherited their share of the green fields. A voyage to Milwaukee on a whaleback is the most popular branch of study in Chicago. In New York, too, there is a real ocean-going vessel in which boys are given a two-years' course in navigation. Probably the most expensive school playground in the world is Seward Park, in the overpacked East Side of New York. There are here three acres that have been captured from commerce at a cost of two and a half millions, in which every fine evening you may see more than seven thousand children playing games and listening to band concerts.

All told, New York City is spending three hundred thousand dollars a year for school playgrounds. Like other cities that have grown swiftly, it did not think of the playground problem until too late. It is now practically impossible to provide as much land as the six hundred thousand children of the greater city ought to have. Five hundred acres more, which would not be too much, would cost at the present time not far from a hundred millions. The best that can be done in some parts of the city is to build playgrounds on the school roofs. This has already been done in a dozen instances.

The United States, of course, has no monopoly of good schools. But there is one respect in which the American public school stands absolutely alone. It is the only institution in which the children of all nations are taught to work and play together—to learn one language and to be loyal to one flag.

#### MAKING AMERICAN CITIZENS

Here is one school in New York, for instance, which is a veritable Noah's Ark of twenty-nine nationalities. Besides a small handful of native-born children, there are Irish, Germans, English, Swedes, Russians, Poles, Greeks, Italians, Hungarians, Egyptians, Rumanians, Scots, Slavs, French, Armenians, Canadians, Danes, Dutch, and a few from odd corners of Africa and the West Indies. Whoever would know what the United States of America means should go from room to room of a school like this, and hear the tiny delegates from all races chanting their daily pledge: "I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands—one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

This pledge is now being taught to a hundred thousand little immigrant children who arrived in the United States last year. It has already been learned by the hundred thousand who came in 1904. They make more progress in patriotism, it seems, than in any other subject.

"The most popular stories that we tell these children," said one of the teachers, "are the stories of George Washington and his cherry-tree exploit, the crossing of the Delaware, and the capture of the Hessians."

In this way they are started on the wide road that leads to American citizenship and farther. Some day, who knows, a son of one of these young newcomers may win a four years' lease of the White House from his fellow Americans. Was not Andrew Jackson the son of an Irish immigrant?

It is the public school, too, which is doing the real work of Americanization in the new communities which we have adopted into the family. There are now forty thousand little brown children in Porto Rico and two hundred thousand in

the Philippines, who are singing "America" and pledging allegiance to the republic which has "liberty and justice for all."

Even in Alaska there are more than two thousand little Eskimos who walk to school over seven feet of snow and answer to such names as Ok-ba-ok and Seg-bruna. And such eager scholars! Some of them are in so great a hurry to get to school that they run away from home before breakfast. Others go four miles in fifty-below-zero weather. Generally, in Alaskan schools, the first lesson is how to get thawed out.

#### ALASKA'S REINDEER SCHOOLS

But probably the most extraordinary schools that any bureau of education ever has had to manage are the fifteen reindeer schools for grown-up Eskimos. Ten thousand reindeer have been brought from Siberia at a cost of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and the Eskimo young men are being trained as herders. After a five-year course of study, each graduate is set up in business with a herd of fifty reindeer, lent to him by the government.

A whole race is thus being put to school. Instead of wandering from place to place, in search of seals and walruses, the Eskimos may now settle down and become prosperous herders. It is said that Alaska might easily support ten million reindeer.

These reindeer schools, by the way, are practically the only ones that have not been captured by the women teachers. Elsewhere, fully three-quarters of our teachers are women. Arkansas has the fewest and New England has the most. William T. Harris, a mere man, is Commissioner of Education; but there are two State superintendents, in Idaho and Colorado, fifteen city superintendents, and twenty-seven heads of normal schools, who belong to what we may call the educational sex.

Fifty years ago a young woman's education was considered satisfactory if she could crochet a Berlin-wool parrot with beaded eyes. But in all American schools at the present time, Alaskan reindeer ranches excepted, all the doors of opportunity are open to girls and boys alike. In fact, so far as our high schools

are concerned, three pupils out of five are girls.

As to when our first public school was started, it is not safe to say. Four or five States are claiming the honor. The truth is that our public school system is very young. The oldest school in New York City is celebrating its centenary this year.

The idea that all children have equal right to life, liberty, and education, is a new one in the history of the human race. The belief that every child has a right to be educated, whether the father can pay the bill or not, was, a century ago, declared to be a dangerous theory.

#### THE SCHOOLS OF PIONEER DAYS

The first schools were certainly small enough to allay all suspicions. One in Virginia was founded by a donation of four cows; another in Massachusetts was endowed by a collection taken up on board ship. George Washington's first teacher was an old slave named Hobby, who was also the gravedigger of the community. He probably learned to read from one of the old-fashioned hornbooks, which consisted of a scrap of parchment nailed to a block of wood and covered with a sheet of transparent horn. If he was lucky enough to have a primer, his lessons were mainly little rhymes, as:

The boy that is good  
Does mind his book well,  
And if he can't read  
Will strive for to spell.

"The New England Primer," most famous of all American school-books, was regarded as a wonder. Its lessons were supposed to contain high moral truths. One of them, for instance, was the burning of "Holy John Rogers" at the stake. The illustration shows the worthy Rogers standing complacently in a sheet of flame, while his wife and ten small children, all about the same size, are looking on with placid indifference. Two million copies of this primer were printed; yet less than fifty of them can now be found.

The little pioneer schools struggled along until about seventy years ago. Then came Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, the real founders of the American public school. What these two men

did is a story that every American should know. They found the public school despised, and they left it honored. They found it poor, and they left it rich. They found it an exception, and they left it universally established.

#### THE WORK OF MANN AND BARNARD

Both began their life-work in the same year—1837. Horace Mann was a typical pioneer—self-made, tireless, and mastered by one idea. Being made secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, for twelve years he worked sixteen hours a day. At the end of that time he had become famous. So had the schools of Massachusetts. He had lifted the whole idea of education to higher levels.

Henry Barnard did for Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin what Horace Mann had done for Massachusetts. His greatest work was a "History of Education" in thirty-one big volumes. He, too, foresaw that the public school was to be the most vital of all American institutions. He believed it to be the foundation of democracy. His favorite story was of a certain New England school where a woodchopper's son won the first prize and the son of the President of the United States the second.

Mann and Barnard sowed the seed; and we are now gathering the fruitage of a two-hundred-and-sixty-million-dollar school system. Our public school has become one of the main pillars of our national pride. True, we are far below the mark in the matter of teachers' salaries. We drive the average young woman teacher into matrimony after four years of service. But, generally speaking, the schools that open this month are the most useful and satisfactory products of American civilization thus far. We should be an envied nation, indeed, if all our other institutions stood on the same level as our public schools.

When Alfred Mosely, the eminent British educator, had finished his thorough examination of our school system, a year or so ago, he was asked to deliver his final verdict.

"Well," said he, "my opinion can best be told by one fact—I have placed my two sons in a school at New Haven to prepare for Yale."





TOUCQUES VALLEY—BY ROBERT DEMACHY, PARIS

The original photograph has been recently purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for two hundred and fifty dollars

*Reproduced from a bichromate of gum print*

## THE ARTIST OF THE CAMERA

BY C. HOWARD CONWAY

THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY—UNIQUE RESULTS ACHIEVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE PHOTO SECESSION, TO WHOM LENS, PLATES, AND CHEMICALS ARE BUT MEDIUMS FOR THE EXPRESSION OF ARTISTIC IDEALS — GROWING INTEREST IN THEIR WORK

A NEW and very definite province has been recently added to the realm of art. As yet, it is practically without a name, so far as the general public is concerned. It calls itself the "Photo Secession"—a negative term for a movement which is essentially positive and creative.

This movement, in its present organized form, is not more than four years

of age, although it has existed as a tendency for a much longer period. It may be fairly described as a banding together of a number of American photographers, who are of an artistic rather than practical temperament, for the purpose of developing photography on its pictorial and artistic side.

The prevalent idea in photography, with which the members of the Photo