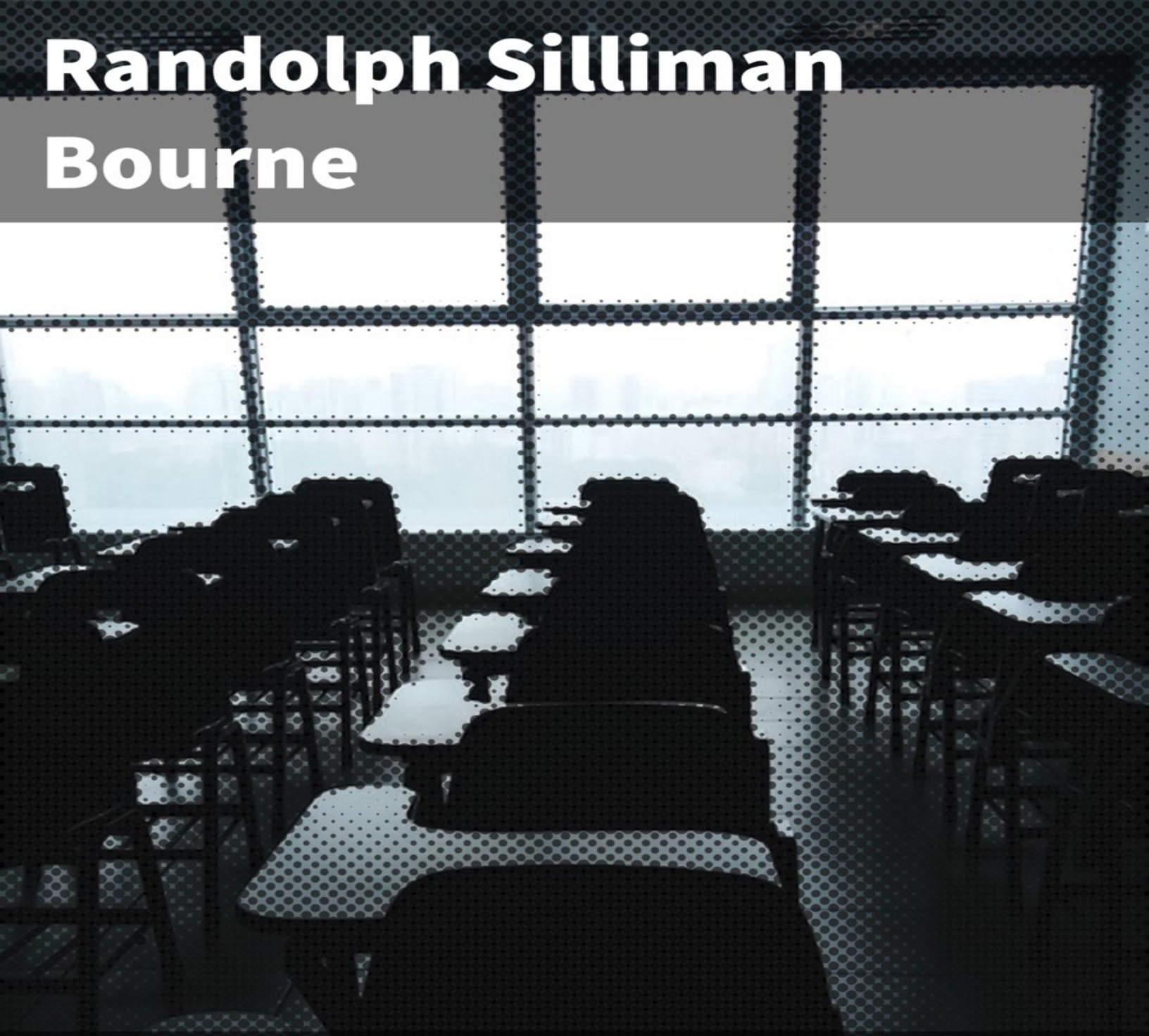
Randolph Silliman Bourne



The Gary Schools

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PREFACE

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The public-school system of Gary, Indiana, has attracted during the last few years the general attention of progressive educators all over the country as perhaps the most ingenious attempt yet made to meet the formidable problems of congested urban life and modern vocational demands which are presented to the administrators of the city school. A broad educational philosophy has combined with administrative skill to produce a type of school which represents a fundamental reorganization of the public school to meet changing social and industrial conditions. A new balance of school activities, an increased wealth of facilities, the opening-up of opportunities to the younger children, the institution of a new kind of vocational training, the fusing of activities into an organic whole so that the school becomes a children's community, the correlation of school activities with community activities, and lastly, the application of principles of economics to public-school management which permit greatly increased educational and recreational facilities not only for children in the schools, but also for adults,—these are the features of the Gary school system that have aroused the enthusiasm of many educators, and made it one of the most visited and discussed school systems in the country. Dr. David Snedden, Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts, has said that the system of education at Gary "more adequately meets the needs of city children than any other system of which the writer has knowledge." Professor John Dewey declared

recently, at a public meeting in New York City, called to discuss the adoption of the Gary plan in the New York schools, that “no more important question affecting the future of the people of New York has come before them for many years.” The United States Bureau of Education in 1914 published a report on the Gary schools, made after “a careful and prolonged study at first hand” extending over a period of two years. In this report Commissioner P. P. Claxton records his belief that “the superintendent and board of education of the Gary schools have succeeded in working out plans for a more economic use of school funds, a fuller and more effective use of the time of the children, a better adjustment of the work of the schools to the condition and needs of individual children, greater economy in supervision, a better correlation of the so-called ‘regular work’ and ‘special activities’ of the school, a more practical form of industrial education, and at a cost less nearly prohibitive than is usually found in public schools in the cities of this country.”

Schools in many towns and cities in all parts of the country have been reorganized on the Gary plan or have been experimenting with it. The Gary plan has been introduced in the schools of small cities such as Sewickley, Newcastle, and Swarthmore, Pennsylvania; Kalamazoo, Michigan; Winetka, Illinois. Kansas City has been experimenting with it. The Chicago authorities have recently pronounced their two years’ experiment an unqualified success. Passaic, New Jersey, has a highly successful Gary school in operation. In Troy, New York, the authorities are reorganizing the entire school system on the Gary plan. In

New York City two schools were operated for most of the school year, 1914-15, Superintendent Wirt of Gary having been called in to supervise the reorganization and advise the Board of Education in their attempt to meet the “part-time” problems in congested school districts. As a result of this experiment the Board of Education has recently decided to extend the Gary plan to two school districts in the Borough of the Bronx, involving fourteen schools and 46,000 pupils. Superintendent Wirt has presented figures to show that, by the adoption of the Gary plan and the expenditure of only $5,000,000 (the cost of a dozen school buildings which would provide at the maximum for 20,000 children), the New York authorities could practically relieve their part-time situation which now involves 132,000 children. Not only has the success of the Gary plan been striking in the larger cities, but it has proved its adaptability to the small school as well. Three of the schools of Gary are practically rural schools in outlying districts, but the principles of the Gary plan are found applicable there as well as in the recently erected model school plants. The flexibility of the plan, the ingenuity and soundness of its economical and educational principles, its feasibility of imitation, and adaptation to communities the most diverse, makes its discussion one of national significance.

The material on the Gary plan has been generally confined to bulletins, magazine articles, and educational reports. One of the best discussions of the Gary school is to be found in a chapter of Professor Dewey’s recent book, which contains, in addition, the educational theory and historical background upon which the Gary plan has been

worked out by Superintendent William Wirt, himself a pupil and disciple of Dewey. I give here a list of the Gary material which I have used. Some of it is generally available, some not. I am much indebted to these investigators. I have even plagiarized from myself.

Books and Bulletins:—

John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey: *Schools of To-Morrow*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

William Paxton Burris: *The Public School System of Gary, Indiana*. Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Education (1914), No. 18. (To be obtained free of charge from the Commissioner of Education, Washington, D.C.) An excellent and very enthusiastic report of a long investigation of the Gary schools.

Graham Romeyn Taylor: *Satellite Cities*. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

Chapters VI and VII of this book contain a comprehensive account of the history and social conditions of the city of Gary up to date.

Magazine articles:—

John Franklin Bobbitt: “The Elimination of Waste in Education.” *The Elementary School Teacher*, February, 1912.

Charles S. Coons: “The Teaching of Science in the Gary Schools.” *School and Society*, April 17, 1915. Able discussion of the philosophy which motivates Gary education, by the teacher of chemistry in Froebel School, Gary.

Raymond Dean Chadwick: “Vitalizing the History Work.” *History Teachers’ Magazine*, April, 1915. By the history

teacher in the Emerson School, Gary.

Randolph S. Bourne: “Schools in Gary”; “Communities for Children”; “Really Public Schools”; “Apprentices to the Schools”; “The Natural School.” Five articles in the *New Republic*, March 27, April 3, April 10, April 24, May 1, 1915. A mere impressionistic survey of the schools based on a personal visit in March, 1915.

Reports:—

William Wirt: *A Report on a Plan of Organization for Coöperative and Continuation Courses*. Department of Education, City of New York.

The Reorganization of Public School 89, Brooklyn, New York. Report made January 19, 1915, to President Thomas W. Churchill, Board of Education, New York City.

Report upon a Proposed Reorganization for Public Schools 28, 2, 42, 6, 59, 44, 5, 53, 40, 32, 4, and 45, The Bronx, New York City.

These three reports are invaluable as a discussion of the philosophy and technique of many of the features of the Gary plan, discussed by the Gary Superintendent of Schools.

Alice Barrows-Fernandez: *A Reply to Associate Superintendent Shallow’s* [of New York City] *Report on the Gary Schools*. Published by the author, 35 West 39th St., New York City.

A valuable document, with a wealth of figures and authoritative discussion of current misconceptions regarding the work of the Gary schools.

R. S. B.

September 1915.

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INTRODUCTION

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During the past fifteen years I have tried approximately fifty different programs for “work-study-and-play schools.” The several factors in such a school program can be combined in countless ways. I have not tried to design a system or type of school program as a set form that would constitute a universal ideal school for all children. Rather, I have tried to develop a system of school administration that would make possible the providing of a great variety of school types, so that all cities and all of the children in the several parts of a city may have the kind of school they need.

I have had only two fixed principles since I began establishing work-study-and-play schools at Bluffton, Indiana, in the year 1900.

First: All children should be busy all day long at work, study, and play under right conditions.

Second: Cities can finance an adequate work-study-and-play program only when all the facilities of the entire community for the work, study, and play of children are properly coördinated with the school, the coördinating agent, so that all facilities supplement one another and “peak-loads” are avoided by keeping all facilities of the school plant in use all of the time.

At what children work, study, and play; how they work, study, and play; when and where they work, study, and play; what facilities are provided for work, study, and play; and the total and relative amount of time given to work,

study, and play;—these may vary with every city and with every school in a city. No set system can possibly meet the needs of all children, nor could a set system be uniformly provided with the existing child-welfare facilities.

It is not desirable or possible uniformly to establish one particular scheme of departmentalizing work between teachers or of rotating classes between different types of facilities. The only important thing is so to departmentalize teaching and so to rotate classes that the teachers may render the greatest service with the least expenditure of energy, and that the maximum use may be secured from the school plant and other child-welfare facilities.

William Wirt.

THE GARY SCHOOLS

I

THE COMMUNITY SETTING

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To set the Gary schools in their proper perspective, one must discount at the start any prevailing impression that the distinctive traits are due to peculiar local conditions, or to the enlightened philanthropy of the United States Steel Corporation, which founded the town in 1906 as the site for its new plant, the most complete system of steel mills west of Pittsburg. For to the steel officials the building of the town was incidental to the creation of the plant. Gary in consequence is far less of a “satellite city” than other made-to-order towns. The opportunity to plan the city, provide fundamental necessities for community life, determine the character of the housing, and predestine the lines of growth, all in the best and most enlightened way, was taken advantage of by the Steel Corporation only in part. Very little of the marvelous science and engineering skill that went into the making of the steel plant went into the even more important task of creating a model city. Several hundred houses were built, it is true, for the skilled labor and officialdom of the plants, but practically no attempt was made to house the low-paid unskilled labor. The result has been the development of large tracts by land speculators, and all the problems of congestion and bad housing and sanitation that curse the larger industrial cities. The

connection of the Steel Corporation with the town has been throughout that of any land and development company. Communal problems have all been thrown upon the people themselves to solve. The new community was incorporated as soon as possible as a municipality under the laws of the State of Indiana, and has organized all its municipal functions, including the public schools, in entire independence of the Steel Corporation, with which it has had no more political or institutional connection than any ordinary American town has with its local industrial interests. The Corporation has by no means paid more than its share of the local taxes, and the schools, in particular, have not only been quite free from the Corporation influence or support, but have even at times run so far counter to the approval of the Corporation officials that the school administration has had difficulty in acquiring its needed sites for new schools. It can be emphatically said that the schools of Gary are no more the product of peculiar conditions than are the schools of numberless rapidly growing Western towns.

The mushroom growth of Gary has not meant a peculiar kind of a town, but simply the telescoping into a few years of the typical municipal evils of graft, franchise fights, saloon dominance, insufficient housing and health regulation, election frauds, and lack of social cohesion. Its dramatic growth has not prevented its becoming a very typical American city. In April, 1906, Gary was a waste of sand-dunes and scrub-oak swamps at the southern end of Lake Michigan. Three years later it had a steel plant covering an area of a square mile and capable of employing

140,000 men; it had a population of 12,000; 15 miles of paved streets, 25 miles of cement sidewalks, $2,000,000 worth of residences, sewer, water, gas, and electric facilities; it had 2 banks, 6 hotels, 3 dailies, 2 schools, 10 church denominations, 46 lawyers, 24 physicians—in short, all the paraphernalia of the modern city. The visitor who goes to-day to Gary finds a typically varied American city, rather better built than the average, and rather unusually favored in its open spaces. Situated within thirty miles of Chicago, the city presents a rather pleasing contrast to the long chain of industrial towns that stretches for miles in every direction across the treeless prairie. With a well-built business section, lines of residence streets, handsome public buildings and churches, electric cars and taxi-cabs, Gary has a settled air of community life unusual even for an older town. It has almost the aspect of a commercial rather than an industrial center. It is the focus of the county trade, and the extent of its business and middle-class residential districts is somewhat larger than in neighboring towns. The steel mills and subsidiary plants are massed along the lake and the artificially constructed harbor. The great immigrant population, largely of cheap and illiterate proletarian labor from southeastern Europe, inhabits the congested district of the South Side. The mills are separated from the town by a small river which forms almost a moat for the great industrial fortress. The town is laid out in checkerboard fashion, with a wide main avenue a hundred feet wide and cross-streets sixty feet wide. Alleys run the long way of the blocks, and contain the sewer and water mains. Ethnologically the population is very mixed. Thirty

nationalities are said to be represented in the schools, but this large foreign population is a familiar phenomenon in the American industrial town. A rough census taken in 1908 gave the foreign population of Gary as fifty-six per cent of the whole. In 1912 it was only forty per cent, or a decrease of sixteen per cent. The alien influx has not destroyed the essentially characteristic American features of the city. The native American element has always predominated politically and socially. For an American city of its size to-day, Gary represents, not a specialized community, but a fairly harmonious distribution of social classes, races, occupations, and interests. It is essentially a normal, variedly functioning, independent community, and the schools have been developed to meet the needs of a modern varied urban community.

It must be emphasized that neither the demands of a peculiar type of industrial community nor the work of benevolent philanthropy created the schools of Gary. They have been developed in response to the typically current needs of a normal American municipality. They have had to meet the same situations which all American cities are confronting in their effort to educate “all the children of all the people.”

Organized under a school administration consisting of a board of education with three members working in conjunction with a superintendent of schools, the school system depends for support entirely upon local taxation and the usual sources of revenue, and enjoys no unusual municipal or financial advantages. On the contrary, the enterprise of providing public schools for the town of Gary