IV. THE GREAT EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN OF 1828-1829: A PHILOSOPHY AND A PROGRAM

The school campaign was waged on two fronts. It was necessary to awaken the public and demonstrate that the welfare of all citizens would be served by a statewide system of common school education. It was also necessary to convince the state legislature of the need and feasibility of the scheme. In consequence, the advocates of common schools, Robert Baird in the forefront, launched intensive publicity and lobbying campaigns.

To stimulate public interest in the subject Baird travelled extensively throughout the state during the summer and fall of 1828. Supported by the New Jersey Missionary society, he would sometimes preach, and sometimes fill a local pulpit for a clergyman temporarily assigned to beat the hustings.[1] As effective as personal appeals could be, they could not begin to reach the attention of all the influential citizens of New Jersey, all too many of whom would have little cause to appear at a church meeting. A much more effective instrument was the popular press, and as early as 1827 a lively correspondence on the subject of popular education appeared in such influential papers as the Princeton _Patriot_ and the Newark _Sentinel of_

[1]See Albert Barnes to Robert Baird, Morristown, New Jersey, October 7, 1828. Miscellaneous Papers, Princeton University Library. Baird had such a working arrangement with Barnes, but Barnes had to withdraw due to his illness with "intermittent fever" and the unfortunate attack of "the hooping [_sic_] cough" which had hit three members of his family.

Freedom and New-Jersey Advertiser. Baird was quick to appreciate the effectiveness of this medium, and under the pseudonym of "A Friend to Education" published an extensive series of essays "to the people of New-Jersey" which were printed and reprinted in most of the newspapers of the state.[2]

Baird's essays effectively synthesized contemporary educational ideas. In them, he presented arguments for a common school system, evidences of a universal movement towards common school education in other states and the more "civilized" countries of the world, a workable plan for implementing educational reform together with a defense of its merits, and rebuttals of all commonly held objections to a common school system. From the viewpoint of the twentieth century, the arguments in the essays hardly look progressive, nor were many especially originial with Baird. Yet they are important enough to merit rather close attention: first, because they present the most readily available compendium of nineteenth century evangelical thought on the subject of education, and second, because a consideration of them should rectify a neglect of conservative contributions to the evolving American common school. Many of Baird's arguments were not very distinguishable from those of the acknowledged leaders in the common school movement--men like Horace Mann. More notably, they pre-date them.

The philosophy of education which Baird articulated had its origin in a specific conception of human nature, based on a heavily modified or liberalized Calvinism. Evangelicals still agreed that

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[2]Burr, Education in New Jersey, p. 249.

original sin had left man susceptible to every form of vice, but no longer were they convinced that human depravity was immune to any sort of meliorating influence. Indeed, their basic position was quite optimistic. True, the human heart was "corrupted soil," capable of being "overgrown in a short time with weeds of every useless, wild, and ugly description." But, this was not inevitable. Human nature was proclaimed by Baird to be

> . . . as susceptible of moral, as it is of mere intellectual improvement, and may be cultivated in the one respect under the discipline of education, as truly as in the other. At the same time, the capacity which it has for moral excellence is exceedingly more important, than that which it has for any other sort of excellence, and constitutes its highest dignity, as well as its most exalted privilege. Plainly, then, that education alone is worthy of the name, which contemplates and consults the right development and culture of this capacity, as an object of primary interest.[3]

Perhaps man could not save himself, but he could cultivate moral excellence. Perfection might not be possible, but improvement was, especially if the process began early enough. Baird was no Lockean sensationalist, conceiving of the infant mind as a tabula rasa, but he, as well as other evangelicals, claimed that the minds of the young were highly impressionable--for good or ill, depending on the environment. One of the most effective instruments for altering behavior was the common school, for the "youthful mind is submitted to [its] influence, when it is yet in great measure unformed in its moral shape, where it yields, like wax, to the slightest impression, when it can be

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[3] [Robert Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 4," [Newark, New Jersey] Sentinel of Freedom and New-Jersey Advertiser, September 16, 1828, p. 2. Hereafter this newspaper will be cited as the Sentinel of Freedom.

moulded [sic] more easily and effectually under the power of instruction, than it ever can at any future period."[4]

The vital importance which evangelicals attached to moral training was at least partly a product of their perceptions of American society. Many evangelicals were socially conservative and skeptical of political and social democracy--though not at all sympathetic to rigid class lines. Being middle class, they viewed the lower classes with suspicion, nor did they consider a leisured, powerful upper class an adornment to society. In fact, they prided themselves on virtues of enterprise, solidity, frugality, and moral regularity, which they claimed to hold in contradistinction to both the vicious poor and the licentious rich. They could truly trust democracy only when their values permeated the society as a whole.

The relaxing of Calvinist opinions about human nature, coupled with the inescapable fact that the American experiment in Republican government had endured for nearly fifty years, offered hope to all but the most irreconcilable elitists. Clearly, democracy, such as it was, had not led to chaos and disintegration, and the trend towards extending democratic principles was irreversible and accelerating. Wise men would swim with the tide rather than drown. Such wisdom was not beyond the ken of Robert Baird. If education could train the moral faculties, it might also be able to provide the body politic with political wisdom. Ideally, it would prepare the common people to accept the judgment of their betters until such time as they

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[4][R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 2," Sentinel of Freedom, September 2, 1828, p. 2.

themselves acquired "correct sentiments": more realistically, it would prevent them from embarking on rash adventures when they achieved their majority. Thus education became the hope which mediated peace between evangelicals and republican government. As Baird put it, "The government, under which we have the happiness to live, is more than any other in the world, founded in the knowledge and virtue of the people. It becomes every American citizen to be pre-eminently, in comparison with men who live under monarchical forms of government, a man of knowledge." Education, widely disseminated throughout the populace, was the only means of assuring the competency of every citizen as he chose his representatives, or judged the measures which those representatives advocated. Only through education could the sanctity of American institutions, and the "continuance and efficiency" of American laws be assured.[5]

While the liberal attachment to education as a guarantor of progress has long been recognized, the appeal of education as a conservator of the status quo and the effectiveness of this appeal as an inducement which rallied conservatives to the cause of common school education has been less appreciated. In the thought of evangelicals like Baird, both strains coexisted, and indeed depended on each other. Secular allies in the school crusade looked on both Christianity and education as servants of Order. Baird sought to buttress his own arguments favoring common schools with those of men from all parts of the country--men whose status and prestige would lend weight to

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[5] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 1," Sentinel of Freedom, August 26, 1828, p. 2.

their words.[6] One such political figure was Ezra Butler, Governor of Vermont. Butler's statement presents as concise a summation of the conservative position as one is likely to find. Baird printed it with wholehearted endorsement. Butler wrote:

> The importance of common school education demands the serious attention of all classes of people, but more especially of such individuals as have had the most favorable opportunities for observation, and for appreciating the justice of its claims. It forms the chief support of Christianity and genuine Republicanism; and in promoting the former, it gives efficacy to the latter. As ignorance and prejudice interpose the strongest barriers to the progress of the one, they not only impede the progress, but render valueless the blessings and privileges of the other:--nay more! where their dominion is unrestricted, the people are incompetent for self-government. Knowledge and Christianity mutually aid each other, and at the same time constitute the only firm pillars of our Government.[7]

Thus the ideas of the nature of man and society which made common school education so attractive to Baird can be summarized in a few simple axioms: Man in his natural state is a very imperfect creature. As such, he is prone to mischief and incapable of self-government. However, man is educable, morally as well as intellectually. Therefore, education, by ameliorating the imperfections which are a

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[6]For example, Baird wrote Roberts Vaux, Quaker philanthropist in Philadelphia, "I beg leave to request that you will furnish me with whatever documents you may posess, for a short time, on the subject of the efforts which have been made by the Legislature of Pennsylvania to promote common schools in that State. We are now making great efforts in this State (New Jersey) to collect information on the actual condition of our schools; with the hope that this information which will be mournful & appalling enough, will at length induce the Legislators of our State to adopt an efficient system of Common Schools." Robert Baird to Roberts Vaux, September 3, 1828. Vaux Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

[7]Sentinel of Freedom, November 11, 1828, p. 2.

part of his nature, can perfect him to the point at which the success of a republican system of government becomes a possibility, if not a certainty, where order is protected, and where progress towards social perfection can be reasonably expected.

Few votes are likely to be won by the presentation of social theories, no matter how reasoned they may appear. Nor is there much substance in the realm of abstraction which could arouse a citizenry to the point of demanding change. Education had to offer concrete advantages before persons would attach their aspirations to it and invest in bringing it to their fellow citizens. Baird and those he represented had firm ideas of what education should be--what should be taught, by whom, in what manner, and with what expected advantages.

The education Baird sought to offer to the children of New Jersey was hardly innovative. The curriculum was essentially the same as that considered necessary in the eighteenth century. The "three R's" held the central position--"reading, including correct spelling and pronunciation, writing a good hand, and arithmetic." Such "frills" as might be added were highly pragmatic: "In many places, a knowledge of mensuration, surveying, navigation, and the elements of natural philosophy [science], &c. will be desirable." To these were added the workhorses of liberal education, English grammar, history and geography. The first of these disciplined the mind, while the latter two were unequaled as repositories of moral illustrations--the triumph of virtue and defeat of vice.[8]

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[8] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 3," Sentinel of Freedom, Sept. 9, 1828, p. 2.

It was in the area of subject matter that Baird and his fellows lagged furthest behind the ideas of leading educators of their day. They never considered formal education could have a directly vocational function. Recognition of the school as a place where trades could be learned or agriculture advanced was simply beyond their vision. The humanities were also slighted. Evangelicals had not yet been reconciled to literature--at best it was foolishness, at worst, an inflamer of passions and a purveyor of vice. Art and music were genteel accomplishments to be left to the upper classes. (It should be mentioned, however, that even the progressive Horace Mann included music in his curriculum primarily because he felt that the exercise singing afforded the lungs would help prevent tuberculosis!) Lest Baird and his fellows seem too reactionary, it should be noted that considerations of intellectual subject matter were only peripheral to their concern. There is no reason to assume that Baird objected to including a given subject in a curriculum simply because he did not specifically mention it as being desirable. He recognized that society's needs and wants were changing, and expected educational changes to accompany, if not anticipate them. "Our teachers ought always to be ahead, of what is demanded by the public voice, and the wants of the times," he wrote, "otherwise the standard of education is not likely to be advanced."[9]

Far more important to evangelicals was moral education. Reading, writing, arithmetic, natural philosophy, and similar disciplines, however they "might be dignified with the title of science"

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[9] Ibid.

could hardly have "any effect to purify the heart of man, or promote the good morals of a community." And these objects were at the center of the evangelicals' concern, for they would lead to community order, stability, and virtue. "Abstract science" was only to be a servant to aid in developing an "acquaintance with moral obligation." What had to be learned were "the relations which we sustain to those around us, beginning with our parents and relatives, and to God our Creator, Preserver, Saviour [sic] and Judge."[10] Moral principles such as these were the bedrock upon which society was built, and without their support society would crumble. The one great resource of this value-laden education was the Bible, and Bible reading should occupy a significant portion of the scholar's time. The Bible should be used as a vehicle for training morals, rather than for inculcating sectarian doctrine. Here again Baird's position did not seem too distant from Horace Mann's, although they might be expected to disagree on precisely what might be considered "sectarian." Mann probably would have raised no objection to Baird when he argued that

> the Bible should be read, not in the light and trifling way in which it is too much read in our schools, but in a serious and solemn manner, especially at the close of the duties of the school; and the teacher should often enforce the duties which it inculcates, on the minds of the scholars, relative to their parents--their brothers & sisters, and all those around them. This kind of education would promote the good morals of the community, as well as diffuse the knowledge which is desirable.[11]

With the inculcation of virtue the prime duty of the school,

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[10] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 1," _Sentinel of Freedom_, August 26, 1828, p. 2.

[11] _Ibid._

the character of the teacher, as moral leader, was considered more important than any body of knowledge he attempted to convey to his charges. Baird, himself a former teacher, devoted considerable energy to giving his readers a proper notion of the importance of the teacher in the community. Good teachers were essential to a successful school; lacking them, no amount of money spent on education would be able to forestall failure.

The social system Baird considered ideal was derived from that of seventeenth century New England. The dual pillars upon which a community should rest were the schoolmaster and the "spiritual teacher." While the preacher was still a respected community leader in nineteenth century New Jersey, the schoolmaster's vocation had lost its former esteem, a situation Baird found deplorable. Society showed its disinterest in "proper education" by paying its schoolmasters niggardly salaries. Low pay attracted only mediocre men. The prevalence of mediocre teachers only drove the prestige of the teaching vocation even lower. It was a vicious circle. Baird remarked sarcastically, "people seem too generally to think that they may dispense with right moral character in their schoolmaster, as safely as they may do without it in their tailors or their shoemakers."[12]

Baird recognized that whatever "science" of education existed was still in its infancy. No one had determined a way to judge teaching effectiveness. But even if standards of excellence were vague, Baird observed that "before we have at all surveyed the length and the

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[12] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 4," Sentinel of Freedom, September 16, 1828, p. 2.

breadth, the height and the depth, of this neglected interest, we are compelled at once to perceive that hardly any department of service in the whole order of society is so wretchedly and inadequately filled." Baird's principal complaint was with the moral, rather than the intellectual inadequacy of the majority of the corps of teachers he was indicting. "Why," he asked, "should an enlightened community be satisfied with common teachers, utterly incompetent for their work? Why should a drinking, profane, or otherwise ungodly schoolmaster, be looked upon with more indulgence, than would be felt toward a Professor in any of our colleges, degraded in the same manner?"[13]

But freedom from "gross vices" was not enough in his opinion. A teacher had to be a moral paragon--a template against whose likeness succeeding generations could be shaped. No area of a child's training should be overlooked. The view Baird held of the child was holistic; each virtue reinforced the rest, while every flaw put the entire creation in jeopardy. Diligence and industry, self-government and "control over their passions" were essential elements in the kind of orderly, stable society Baird considered ideal. A good teacher would succeed in helping his charges acquire them. But no less important were "personal cleanliness, propriety of dress, pleasing manners, &c." The teacher should help his children form appropriate habits in these areas as well, using a judicious blend of precept and example.[14]

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[13] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 2," Sentinel of Freedom, September 2, 1828.

[14] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 4," Sentinel of Freedom, September 16, 1828, p. 2.

Finally, and one might suspect, most importantly, a good teacher should "not be a man of licentious principles on the subject of religion." "He should honour the sanctuary and the Sabbath and the Bible; he should be associated in character and feeling with the serious portion of society; he should be competent and disposed to give his scholars familiar instruction on the subject of religion."[15] Interestingly, Baird did not demand "personal piety" or church membership as a qualification. (Indeed, even Sunday School teachers were not required to profess Christianity. See the following chapter.) What was required was a sympathy for Christianity and a willingness to promote its spiritual and social welfare. "True piety" was extremely desirable, but was like icing on the cake.

If Baird's portrait of an ideal schoolmaster carries with it a taint of deadening Victorianism, his ideas of proper teaching technique sound surprisingly modern. Lacking the benefits of twentieth century psychological concepts, he drew upon personal experience and common sense to promote a pedagogy which perhaps can only be criticized for the passive role ascribed to the learner. In Baird's mind, the pupil was an empty vessel into which knowledge and attitudes were to be poured. A wise teacher respected the nature of the vessels. His leadership was benevolent. He had to be aware of the "habits of thought," and natural talents of his students. He also had to know how far they had previously progressed before he could continue their tutelage. On the basis of these considerations he would adapt his

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[15]<u>Ibid</u>.

instructional methodology to each student individually, recognizing that there was no one sure path to knowledge. He knew that learning could not be forced on anyone against his will, but by studying diligently "the character of the mind and heart of each of his pupils" he might hope to "win them, by one way or another, to the love of knowledge."[16]

A society which recognized the importance of education, which revered the schoolmaster, and which was blessed with well ordered schools in which intellectual and moral truths were skillfully taught could expect tangible benefits. As early as the 1820's, American confidence in education as a panacea for almost all social problems had come close to being accepted as an article of faith--along with belief in the sanctity of property and the superiority of republican government it was assuming a central position in the American creed.

To some extent the faith in education Baird expressed represented a weakening (although unconscious) of Calvinist social theory under the onslaught of rationalistic and humanistic ideas. Sin, for example, was less a product of the direct actions of Satan in this world, and more a by-product of ignorance:

> . . . the man who is degraded by ignorance and vice, a slave to his corrupt propensities and desires, and destitute of virtuous and elevated sentiments, is not only individually miserable, and useless as a member of society, but is a contaminator of the moral atmosphere around him, and is ready to become . . . the destroyer of the liberty of his country . . . and of the happiness around him . . . On the contrary, there is the closest alliance between knowledge and virtue--

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[16][R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 3," Sentinel of Freedom, September 9, 1828, p. 2.

> between virtue and happiness; and no community will long continue to be virtuous and moral where the people generally live in ignorance.[17]

The most ardent supporter of the enlightenment would find it hard to raise objections to the above statement. In fact, Baird was not above citing the authority of enlightenment figures to help prove his points--citing in one instance figures provided by David Hume which purported to show a decrease in crime arising from an increase in public knowledge.[18]

Beyond promoting social virtue, education would benefit society by increasing community wealth, promoting "skillful inventions and useful arts." An increase in wealth and a concomitant diminishing of poverty would lead to diminishing crime. "Let our children grow up in ignorance," warned Baird, "and we shall find that pauperism, and vice and crimes will multiply and taxes must be paid to support poor-houses, and jails, and State Prisons!"[19] Baird thought that British experience proved his argument conclusively. The lower classes in England and Ireland were "wholly uneducated," while those in Scotland received at least elementary training. Because of this, crime was rampant in the first two realms, and practically unknown in the third. One town in England sent more felons to the colonies in three months than did all of Scotland in a year.[20]

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[17] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 1," Sentinel of Freedom, August 26, 1828, p. 2.

[18] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 17," Sentinel of Freedom, January 6, 1829, p. 2.

[19] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 15," Sentinel of Freedom, December 16, 1828, p. 2.

[20] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 17," Sentinel of Freedom, January 6, 1829, p. 2.

A final benefit of education was that it offered opportunities for self-improvement, leading to the cultural elevation of the entire community. While most of New Jersey's citizens would never enter a college or even an academy, all of them could develop their capacities privately, providing that they had acquired the fundamentals universal elementary education promised to provide. Even the most humble citizen could acquire "valuable knowledge, learned from books or the newspapers, in his leisure hours," if he had received a rudimentary education. Men who lacked the basic keys to such scholarly recreation were forced to look for diversion in less wholesome surroundings, "the tavern,--the dramshop, or some other place of dissipation."[21]

Up to this point in his argument Baird was primarily expressing beliefs held in common by almost everyone. No one doubted that knowledge was better than ignorance, or that an educated society was likely to be more wise, virtuous, and prosperous than an ignorant one. But what Baird was proposing was not an abstract ideal but a concrete educational system which ventured far enough from traditional practices to cause great opposition to arise. Baird sought for New Jersey a state-supported common school system in which all could be educated and for which all would pay.

Universal education supplied through a system of community supported schools had been an ideal in colonial Massachusetts from its earliest days. From the beginning, service to the ideal had been more by lip than by act, however, and by the time of the American Revolution

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21 [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 1," Sentinel of Freedom, August 26, 1828.

conditions in even the most concerned colonies had deteriorated. In New Jersey and states to the south, public education had never taken hold of the public imagination. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, however, interest in education experienced a renaissance throughout the United States.

Even though public interest in formal education was higher in 1825 that it had been in 1800, opportunities were severely limited. For the wealthy, private boardimg and day schools were available. But often these academies appeared only to sink into oblivion after a year or two. Also, the tuition fees were prohibitive for many. In large communities there were schools which operated with some public assistance, perhaps in the form of the donation and maintenance of a schoolhouse, but their quality and availability varied widely from community to community. Though their charges were smaller than those charged by the private schools, they still exceeded the resources of the poorer classes. In some cases the poor received community aid in meeting school fees, and in many instances individuals left bequests for "pauper education," yet the stigma associated with acceptance of public or private charity led many parents who were eligible for assistance to keep their children home, rather than admit their poverty.

Such a system was no longer capable of fulfilling the role society demanded of it. It tended to isolate social classes from each other, a situation Americans of all persuasions considered dangerous in light of European experiences of revolution and of industrial and peasant poverty. What was needed was a system which would educate all the children--together. Over the course of more than fifty years

years such a system evolved.

The common school has become so ingrained in the American social system that it is difficult to imagine a time when it was a novel idea. Yet in New Jersey in the 1820's the idea was novel. The struggle Baird and his allies had in New Jersey was no easier than the one Horace Mann waged in Massachusetts or William Seward faced in New York. People had to be convinced to tax themselves to pay for what had always been considered a private responsibility. The rich, as well as the childless had to be trained to recognize the indirect benefits which would accrue to them from a system for which they had no visible need. In order to convince them, Baird framed his appeal in terms of economic and social self-interest.

The benefits to parents of the respectable classes were obvious. Because all citizens would help bear the cost of the school system, they would find their expenses decreased. Whatever increases in taxes would be necessary would be offset by a decline in tuition costs.[22]

If wealthy parents sent their children to the common schools, they would achieve the same economies as middle class parents would achieve from the system. For those who chose to send their children to private schools, or for the childless, other economic benefits would be achieved. Baird was firmly convinced that society was faced with two alternatives: order could be achieved either by voluntary cooperation or by coercive means, but in any case, society had to

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[22] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 15," Sentinel of Freedom, December 16, 1828, p. 2.

preserve order. Money withheld from education would have to be spent in other, less productive ways, Baird argued--for jails, poorhouses, and the like. It made little sense to be penny-wise and pound-foolish.[23]

But Baird felt that the monied classes faced far greater dangers than the tax-collector's petty assaults on their pocketbooks. He and men of his station had become acutely aware of growing class differences in America. When a survey of the educational status of New Jersey's citizens revealed that there were more than 14,000 illiterate adults and over 12,000 uneducated children,[24] Baird saw in the figures the signs of a permanent pauper class, separated from the American mainstream, developing a life of disorder and dissipation one and all alike. Distinct social classes were not compatible with the American dream. To be sure, there were to be inequalities of station, but each in his station served the public good, and each one who performed his role worthily was deemed a virtuous citizen. Each man should be "deeply interested in the welfare of those around him," wrote Baird.[25] Mobility insured peace between citizens of different stations of life. Each citizen would have the opportunity to advance as far as his abilities merited. But if a permanently submerged class developed, class warfare would be inevitable. The specter of revolutionary France hung heavy on the mind of Robert Baird. It was in the interest of the

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[23] Ibid.

[24] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 5," Sentinel of Freedom, September 23, 1828, p. 2.

[25] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 15," Sentinel of Freedom, December 16, 1828, p. 2.

rich to spend part of their income to relieve the burdens of the able poor. Baird demanded whether it was not

> highly important to the rich, for the security of their property, and the successful enjoyment of the blessings which affluence yields, that those that grow up in their vicinity should be virtuous and intelligent.

Otherwise, the poor might raise a tyranny, "under the baleful influence of which, riches will prove anything but a blessing."[26]

Common schools would not only break down class barriers, but would also promote sympathy among the members of the various classes by educating their children in a common setting. Rich children would provide good examples for the children of the poor and in turn would learn to treat them without arrogance. At the same time the rich would be spared the "great expense and risk of [their children's] morals" which attended going to boarding schools.[27] Poor children would profit by being educated with the children of the rich "without having an odious distinction drawn between them and other classes."[28]

Baird and his cohorts saw common school education as a means of minimizing class differences. It was to be an instrument of acculturation, even as it would be when America looked for ways to assimilate European immigrants half a century and more later--only in this case the group to be assimilated was the indigenous poor. Baird and others involved in the campaign had no doubts about the leavening influences

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 1," Sentinel of Freedom, August 26, 1828, p. 2.

of common education. None of them thought the poor had any cultural contributions to make. They were to be junior members in the American family, ready to take counsel and guidance from those whose breeding and station demonstrated superiority. No longer would "the character of upright men suffer" under attacks engendered by ignorance.[29] The poor would know their station and accept it willingly. Equality would exist, but on the social and moral terms of the rich and well-born. Governor Butler put it bluntly: "[common schools] tend to maintain equality among . . . citizens, by forming the poor into agreeable companions for the rich."[30]

Baird had placed his arguments for a common school system before his audience in the terms which would be most attractive to them. He demonstrated the social, economic, and spiritual benefits of education and the special benefits of common schools as compared with the prevailing pattern of private and pauper schools. Had he rested at that point, however, it is doubtful that the legislature would have enacted the necessary legislation. Public attention had to be focused upon a plan of action if legislators were to be stirred out of their apathy. Baird had such a plan ready, and by promoting it he put the legislature in a position where some sort of action, affirmative or negative, was inevitable. Pious words, paens to the virtues of universal education, could no longer camouflage a lack of deeds.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 12," Sentinel of Freedom, November 11, 1828, p. 2.

The crux of Baird's plan was active state intervention in the form of legislation making the establishment of schools mandatory. Previous legislation, which gave townships permission to levy taxes for schools had proved ineffective. Most townships, reluctant either from poverty or disinterest, ignored the legislation.[31] Nor were private religious and benevolent societies able to shoulder the responsibilities the townships shirked. The task was too big for their limited resources, and denominational squabbles further restricted their effectiveness.[32] The state, however, was a neutral organization, in which all persons felt a common interest, which could "excite no jealousy in any quarter." As such it was the ideal instrument under whose auspices men of many persuasions could unite to effect common policies while protecting their individual opinions on other matters.[33]

Under the program Baird contemplated, the state had three main responsibilities. First, it was to assure that common schools were available in every county in the state. Second, it was to

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[31][R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 6," Sentinel of Freedom, September 30, 1828, p. 2.

[32]The sectarian dissension which had hit the New Jersey Missionary Society's school campaign carried over into the common school campaign, again because the Presbyterians were its most vigorous promoters. Baird, of course, denied the plan was designed to benefit any sect, reminding his readers that every Christian had to belong to some denomination, remarking, "will any christian [sic] hold back because he beholds another of a persuasion or denomination different from his own, in some unessential points, active in the cause? No; we are confident that this will not be the case. Otherwise, we shall have to wait until men who are not christians at all, first lead the way in good enterprises; which we do not think will soon come to pass." [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 15," Sentinel of Freedom, December 16, 1828, p. 2.

[33][R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 6," Sentinel of Freedom, September 30, 1828, p. 2.

provide a significant portion of the funds needed to operate them. The major source of revenue was expected to be the interest from the school fund, about twenty thousand dollars a year. Added to this would be funds from miscellaneous sources--the sale of state lands, revenues generated by internal improvements, and perhaps a small tax on industries.[34] It was anticipated by Baird that only a portion of the interest from the school fund would have to be used, the rest could be added to the principal sum.

The chief administrative officer at the state level was to be the state treasurer, who would also be designated "superintendent of common schools." He would determine the number of children between the ages of five and sixteen residing in each township and then authorize the county treasurers to draw upon the school fund and other allotted monies a share proportional to the number of children residing in them.[35]

The state had no voice in decisions as to curriculum or designs of schools. Baird felt such matters would be better handled on the local level. He did feel there was one policy question too important to leave to local whim, however, and thus the third educational responsibility of the state was to use "legislative interference" to raise the standards of the teaching profession, by preventing "incompetent men from engaging in this business," and by holding out "inducements to suitable men to enter into this work."[36]

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[34] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 8," Sentinel of Freedom, October 14, 1828, p. 2.

[35] Ibid.

[36] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 6," Sentinel of Freedom, September 30, 1828, p. 2.

The responsibility of actually running schools rested in the local township. Town meetings would be directed to elect committees of "commissioners of schools" which would directly administer them. The school committee was to be directed to "assemble the people of each district, and induce them to build a school house, keep it in good repair, supply fuel, and keep up a school in it, at least three months in each year."[37] Furthermore, they were to examine teachers in the districts and make sure they were performing their duties satisfactorily. The local committees were also assigned responsibility for keeping the schools solvent, the amount of money available from the state being too small to bear the entire cost of the common school system. Baird felt that the state contribution had much importance as seed money, however. Every dollar received by the local school board generated two dollars in local funds. The commissioners were authorized to raise the money by levying a tax on property.[38] Baird considered the local taxation principle an asset of the plan. Others would have had the state bear the entire cost. Baird preferred his proposal because he felt that only by forcing the local community to raise the principal portion of funds could the local community's interest in education be assured. Furthermore, he felt the tax burden would be very light:

> . . . require all to pay a tax for the support of schools, and you will see the rich man, whose tax is increased by the operation of the act, _two_ or

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[37] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 8," _Sentinel of Freedom_, October 14, 1828, p. 2.

[38] _Ibid_.

> three dollars, and the poor man, who has to pay twenty cents more than usual every year, take a prodigious interest in the subject. They will both fasten an eagle-eyed supervision upon the trustees of their school district, and the school committee of their township. They will both determine to have the worth of their money. The poor man will even send all the children he has got, before he will be cheated out of his twenty cents. Depend upon it, there is nothing about mankind so tender, so acutely sensitive, as their purses.[39]

So enthralled was Robert Baird with the incentive features of his tax plan that he never considered whether its features provided for an equitable dispersal of state funds. In fact, if one of the purposes of the entire campaign was to aid education in the impoverished areas of the state, Baird's plan was grossly inadequate. The wealthier the area of the state, the lower its tax rate could be. Wealthy counties would have no trouble raising their share of the money, while poor counties risked the danger of forfeiting their share of state education funds because they could not raise tax rates high enough to provide the required two thirds which had to be raised locally. Ideally, the distribution program would have been based on need, the poorer counties receiving aid from the richer ones, but perhaps it would be too much to expect that Baird would have anticipated all the problems that implementation of his plan would confront. Moreover, even a slight redistribution of income might have been an obstacle to its passage in the legislature.

Baird's third projected source of income for common schools was the parents of the children attending them. He argued that the

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[39][R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 14," Sentinel of Freedom, November 28, 1828, p. 2.

parents as well as the general community should bear part of the cost of educating their children, for in no other way could their continuing interest be assured. Baird shared the conservative's antipathy towards giving anyone something for nothing. Connecticut was presently experimenting with common school education totally supported by public funds--a system Baird considered little better than no system at all. It was a bad practice to encourage indolence and reliance on public funds. Sturdy, independent citizens should no more rely on public than on private charity.[40] State and local funds should only be used to augment the exertions of the parents and make them less sacrificial. The function of state and local economic support was to bring the cost of education within the reach of all but the most poverty stricken children. Baird predicted that costs to the parents under his system would only amount to about a dollar to a dollar and a half per school quarter.[41] If there were some whose poverty was so severe that even this modest charge was beyond their ability to pay the state would assume the cost. While a declaration of poverty was still embarrassing, parents would at least not see their children segregated into separate schools.[42]

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[40] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 10," Sentinel of Freedom, October 28, 1828, p. 2.

[41] [R. Baird], "To the People of New-Jersey, No. 14," Sentinel of Freedom, November 28, 1828, p. 2.

[42] Albert Barnes to Robert Baird, Morristown, New Jersey, October 7, 1828. Miscellaneous papers, Princeton University Library. Baird was not satisfied with just getting New Jersey papers to publish his articles. By October 18, he had extracted a promise from Robert Walsh, editor of the Philadelphia National Gazette, to publish the the essays as far as circumstances permitted. The Gazette was influential in the Camden-South Jersey area. Robert Walsh to Robert Baird, Philadelphia, October 18, 1828. Miscellaneous papers, Princeton University library.

As much as Baird might claim his program was designed to aid the poor of New Jersey, it would still be reasonable to doubt that he was really concerned about any loss of self-respect the very poor might suffer. No matter how vigorously he touted his program as one designed to aid the poor, its most obvious beneficiary was the middle class, whose social manners were to set the standard, and whose virtues and position were to be protected from attack from below. Men of Robert Baird's convictions would have found a society built upon truly pluralistic values most discomfitting. Differences were tolerable within the boundaries of the Protestant moral ethic, but intolerable outside of it--whether the differences appeared in the lives of the very rich or the very poor. Caught in the urgency of molding an entire society in their own image, they were scarcely aware that they might be riding roughshod over the sensibilities of any other group. It was the middle class that had to be convinced of the merits of a program the expense of which it would bear: it was representatives of the middle class, largely, that would have to be convinced to enact the program. Pressure from that middle class would have to be the instrument for molding the legislative majority necessary if the bill was to pass.

The newspaper campaign was designed to acquaint the bulk of the taxpayers with the program and awaken them to its benefits. Baird must have found it gratifying as he watched all the significant newspapers throughout the state reprint his "Friend to Education" series.[43]

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[43]Burr, Education in New-Jersey, p. 250.

Concurrently, Baird carefully orchestrated a campaign to organize the voters behind the bill. One of his most effective methods of arousing and organizing public opinion was the mass meeting. Evidently the first of these was held in Newark in July, 1828, when the common school crusade was still largely a project of the New Jersey Missionary Society.[44] As the campaign turned toward forcing legislative action, the number of meetings accelerated, particularly in the principal towns of each county. Sussex had her first meeting August 20, 1828, at Newton; and the organizer and principal speaker was Robert Baird himself.[45] The meetings soon took on a set form. Leading local citizens were appointed chairmen and secretaries. A spokesman for the common school cause (usually Robert Baird) presented the "objects of the meeting," and introduced resolutions in their behalf. The September 24, Princeton meeting was typical. The friends of education offered ten resolutions which the meeting passed unanimously. Most of them were rhetorical in nature, but two of them contained substantive proposals. Resolution four specifically charged the Legislature to follow the lead of the progressive states and establish a system of common schools, because such schools would lead to ". . . a much greater aggregate of intelligence, much more enterprise and productive industry, more domestic quiet, a more elevated morality, a greater exaltation of human character, and a larger amount of social enjoyment." The eighth called for every county to send a large delegation

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[44] Sentinel of Freedom, September 2, 1828, p. 2.

[45] Sentinel of Freedom, November 11, 1828, p. 2.

to a state-wide educational convention to be held in Trenton coincidentally with the opening of the legislative session. The members of the convention, acting as representatives of the most substantial members of the legislators' constituencies, would act as a patient lobbyists, "urging the subject of a general and uniform system of common schools, throughout the State, upon the attention of the Legislature, as well as the necessity of making provisions which shall secure to all classes the advantages thereof."[46]

Additional means were necessary to keep interest sustained. In inaugurating them, Baird demonstrated a spark of organizational genius. The key to the operation was a hierarchy of committees which extended to the grass roots level. By the middle of September Baird had the process worked out to a science. A prominent man was set to oversee the work in each county--in Essex, for instance, it was Theodore Frelinghuysen. Baird instructed him to establish a central committee for the county, which then was to establish sub-committees in each township, headed by politically prominent men.

The sub-committees had two functions: first, to gather information on the educational situation in the town and forward it, via the central committee and the education convention to the Legislature; and second, to gather signatures to a petition calling for the Legislature to establish a common school system.[47] The system was very

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[46]Robert Baird to Theodore Frelinghuysen, Princeton, September 13, 1828. Miscellaneous papers, New York Historical Society, New York, New York.

[47]The petition proved to be a potent weapon in the hands of the educational agitators. 200 copies were distributed throughout

effective, partly because each man in the hierarchy was working for

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the state, and it was also reprinted in all the major newspapers: "The subscribers, citizens of the State of N. Jersey, beg leave most earnestly, to commend the subject of common schools, to the early & serious attention of the Legislature. The want and the value of these institutions, have deeply excited the feelings of the community, and form, as we believe, the most powerful motives, and the surest supports, for the exercise of Legislative wisdom. A recent investigation, which has been carefully made, in many parts of the State, has shown that ignorance prevails to an extent truly surprising & deplorable. There are thousands who cannot even read. This development calls, in the most persuasive manner, on the people to solicit the Legislature, to adopt measures, to remove, without delay, so flagrant and humiliating an evil, and form an appeal for the intervention of your exertions, which, we trust, will be irresistible. Your wish, as well as your duty, is, to promote the public welfare, and in no way, as we are firmly persuaded, can that welfare be so certainly and so permanently advanced, as by spreading every where, the opportunities and benefits of education. To develop the resources--to encourage the agriculture--to foster the manufacture--and to increase the general wealth of the State, are objects well worthy the care of your Honourable Bodies;--but the diffusion of knowledge is the only sure foundation of even political blessings. Of what avail are fruitful fields, if the mind is left barren and unproductive? Who can rejoice in the view of flourishing and extensive manufactories, if the people that surround them are like the machines whereby they are moved? What avails a spread of wealth, if the people are poor in the stores of intellectual information,--poor in those things which can alone make rich indeed!

It is well known to your Honourable Bodies, that our neighbouring sister States have been, for some time, engaged in efficient measures for furnishing all classes of their citizens, especially the poor, with the means of education; measures alike honourable to the wisdom and patriotism of their Legislatures, and eminently useful to their rising population. We cannot believe that the enlightened Representatives of New Jersey, will consent to remain inactive, and, of course, stationary, if not retrograde, in reference to this vital interest, while all around us are pressing onward so rapidly in the career of improvement.

The subscribers do not desire to point out to the Legislature, any specific plan for the establishment of common schools, and the universal extension of the means of education. On these points, your careful inquiry and mature judgment will, they hope, be exercised, and in your zeal and wisdom they repose entire confidence. Our purpose is, in the most earnest manner, to urge the subject on your attention: to plead before you, in the most decisive terms, the wants of the community, and their need of speedy relief; to speak to you the voice of the people, to which we know you will listen, and to assure you, that in whatever measures your deliberations may result, provided they are prompt and efficient, you will receive the cordial

another more prominent politically and socially than he was--a certain method of insuring cooperation.

By the time the Legislature convened, public pressure on behalf of a common school system had become intense. Shortly after the first petitions started to arrive in early November, the Assembly appointed a five member committee on public education. The upper Council responded by forming a similar committee within a week. Meanwhile, petitions continued to flow in.[48] And the newspaper barrage did not slacken a moment. The editor of the Sentinel of Freedom commenting on Baird's essays, wrote,

> No intelligent reflecting man can be insensible of the great importance of the topics discussed by the writer of these essays. The impulse already given, should be felt in every family, and in every neighborhood throughout the State; and by the propelling force of public opinion, early receive the assiduous and profound attention of those whom the people shall delegate to make laws and devise measures for the general good of the community.[49]

The portents for the state education convention in Trenton looked very good.

By all reports, the meeting was most impressive. William B. Ewing, Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court, presided. Following Robert Baird's opening address (almost a tradition at education

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and grateful support of your constituents." Printed in the Sentinel of Freedom, October 7, 1828, p. 3. The presence of the petition at many polling places on election day could scarcely have been overlooked by astute New Jersey politicians.

[48]Sentinel of Freedom, November 11, 1828, p. 3; Sentinel of Freedom, November 18, 1828, p. 3.

[49]Sentinel of Freedom, September 30, 1828, p. 3.

meetings by this time) a galaxy of political figures including Lucius Q. C. Elmer and Theodore Frelinghuysen spoke to the cause.[50] Hopes were high that favorable action would be in the offing, but it soon became apparent that serious deliberations on the subject would have to wait until after the Legislature reconvened in January. The November session was short, and the minds of the legislators were preoccupied with the turmoil surrounding the 1828 national election. But most observers felt that the January session would see prompt and favorable action on the issue: "The interesting subject of _common school education_, we presume, will receive the particular attention of the Legislature at their next session," wrote the editor of the _Sentinel of Freedom_, "and during the recess, we hope members will be turning their thoughts to some well digested and feasible [plan?] of operation . . . We are satisfied the time for action has arrived, and the sooner the subject is taken hold of in good earnest, the better."[51]

When the Legislature reconvened, however, it soon became apparent that the common schools campaign had peaked too early. The state education convention had adjourned; the worthies dispersed throughout the state, leaving Robert Baird to lobby among the legislators by himself.

Baird spent most of January and February at the thankless task. His hopes mounted after the Assembly acted favorably on the bill, but the upper house proved recalcitrant at first. He wrote his

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[50] _Sentinel of Freedom_, November 14, 1828, p. 2.

[51] _Sentinel of Freedom_, November 28, 1828, p. 3.

family, "I fear that all my efforts to get a system of common schools established during this session of the Legislature will be fruitless,"[52] and complained to Samuel Southard of the "ignorance and obstinacy" of some of the legislators.[53] But finally, he rounded up the necessary votes in the upper house, and in February, 1829, Governor Peter D. Vroom signed into law the first comprehensive education law in New Jersey.

The common school act of 1829 differed in no important ways from the model proposed by Baird. It provided for dispersal of state funds annually on the basis of the amount of tax money for education raised by the local counties and townships. It also provided for local examining and licensing of teachers and annual reports on the conditions of schools to the Legislature.[54] The measure, while an important first step, was not without flaws. Attendance was not compulsory, of course, but no state had yet taken this step. The method of distributing the state funds was less than effective, but regardless of how imperfect the system was, the creation of any system at all was a major accomplishment, and the labors of the evangelicals were instrumental in bringing it into being. Direct and indirect evidence points to the overwhelming importance of Robert Baird's personal efforts. His peers readily granted him the major share of the honors. John Maclean praised Baird's efforts,[55] and

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[52]Cited in H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 65.

[53]Robert Baird to Samuel Southard, Trenton, February 9, 1829. Samuel Southard papers, Princeton University Library.

[54]Burr, Education in New Jersey, pp. 251-2.

[55]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 56.

James W. Alexander, a principal preacher in Trenton, wrote, "The school system lately adopted by our Legislature . . . owes its passage to the zeal and labor of a single man, Rev. Robert Baird."[56]

The fate of the 1829 bill in the next few years following points indirectly to Baird's importance in the common school controversy. Shortly after the passage of the bill Baird left the state, and in the next two years the bill was changed beyond recognition. In 1830, the licensing provision for which Baird had argued so fervently was repealed, under pressure of powerful private school interests,[57] and in 1831, the law was for all practical purposes repealed, and a substitute enacted which distributed the funds among public, private, and parochial schools.[58] Whether Baird would have been able to stem the tide of reaction had he stayed in New Jersey is only a matter for speculation. Certainly pride in an accomplishment he could rightfully call his would have led him to try to prevent its emasculation. The reaction does show that Baird was more than a midwife to an idea whose time had come. His position and the positions of those who employed him was a progressive one for the 1820's. Society followed them, but only reluctantly. In New Jersey, at least, evangelicals contributed significantly to the development of the American common school system, and history should give them their due.

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[56]John Hall, ed., Forty Years' Familiar Letters of James W. Alexander, Consisting, with the Notes, a Memoir of His Life (New York: Charles Scribner, 1860), Vol I, pp. 123-4.

[57]Burr, Education in New Jersey, p. 252.

[58]Thompson, "The Middle of the Century," p. 159.

During the last few months of 1828 Robert Baird must have given considerable thought to his future. The school campaign was in its final stages, and whether or not the outcome was successful, the young preacher's work in the field was about done. Consideration had to be taken as to where next to apply his energies. In February, 1829, he wrote Samuel Southard, again toying with the idea of taking a chaplaincy. He thought about returning to teaching, and had indeed been offered a professorship at Jefferson College, but turned it down because the duties were too great and the salary too small. He wrote rather wistfully of hoping to find a place where he could "have some leisure" and where he could "quietly and humbly labour [sic] for the good of mankind."[59]

It is doubtful that a "quiet and humble" position would have satisfied him. Baird had enjoyed moving in distinguished company too much to give up the adventure of public life. Had he really desired it, no doubt a comfortable parish should have been his, but his horizons had grown considerably larger. For the moment he continued in missionary work for the New Jersey Missionary Society, raising new churches in the Jersey Pine Barrens,[60] but the opportunities were too limited to excite him for very long.

Baird needed to find employment which offered him the opportunity to display his organizational talents. He was particularly suited for non-denominational, but religious work. He had proved

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[59]Robert Baird to Samuel Southard, February 9, 1829. Samuel Southard papers, Princeton University Library.

[60]Hageman, Princeton and Its Institutions, Vol. II, p. 123.

that he could get along well with members of all the denominations, and he seemed to thrive in positions which allowed him to move familiarly in the circles of the influential and powerful. His restlessness demanded a job which offered a greater stage for his activities than a church, community, or even a single state did. He had no desire to leave the ministry, but he seemed far more interested in its social and moral aspects than in its theological elements. After considering many possibilities, Baird accepted the offer of a position which seemed ideal for him. In 1829 he became General Agent for the American Sunday School Union.