

TRT

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E S S A Y,

O N T H E

M E A N S

O F

IMPROVING PUBLIC EDUCATION,

*Adapted to the United States,*

Samuel Knapp



*Si non cæca ac sopita parentum socordia, et præceptorum eligere sanctissimum quemque, cujus rei præcipua prudentibus cura est, et Disciplinam quæ maxime severa fuerit, Licet.*

*in*  
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*To his Excellency* THOMAS JEFFERSON, PRESIDENT  
*of the UNITED STATES; President of the American  
Philosophical Society of Philadelphia; and the Libe-  
ral Patron of Science and Humanity, this short Es-  
say on public Education, is most respectfully inscri-  
bed by his most obedient*

*and very humble Servant,*

THE AUTHOR.

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*Means of Improving Education.*



IN the investigation of the best means of promoting public Education, and establishing some approved Plan of general Instruction, calculated to diffuse the most equal and extensive advantage to the community, it is most necessary, in the first place, to consider its greatest defects or obstructions.

IN applying this investigation to the United States of America, it cannot be said that there is either any general want of sense to the importance of Education, or inclination and liberality to promote it on the most advantageous scale. No country in the world, under the same circumstances, has, at any period, erected and endowed as many Colleges, Schools and Academies, as have been established and endowed in these states since the revolution.

THIS, however, by no means implies that all has been done, that can be done by a liberal and enlightend people,—that there are no improvements that can be made ; no obstructions that can be removed.

LET a few of the latter be in the first place, considered. The newness of the country with regard to its settlements, and the consequently scattered si-

tuations of its inhabitants must operate much against the establishment of public Schools, by joint interest or subscriptions, at least, in many of the interior or more remote settlements.

IN the second place, it may be observed, that the ease with which property and a comfortable subsistence are acquired, in the greater part of this country, by means less irksome and confined than the duties of the faithful Teacher require, not to speak of the great discouragements they frequently meet with from illiberality, prejudice and ignorance, may be considered as a very powerful obstruction to those possessed of proper talents, engaging in the business of public instruction.

BUT the greatest impediment or obstruction to the progressive improvement of public Education in this or any other country, is the non capacity of the greater part of those who are entrusted with the instruction of Youth. It may be said, that most of them adopt the profession rather from necessity than choice; and consequently, have not made that literary preparation for the business which its importance requires. Not only are a great part of the practitioners in public Instruction deficient in Literary attainments; but also in morals, and that habitual exemplary virtue, which should dignify the character of all who are entrusted with the public Instruction of even the humblest sons of Freedom and Independence.

THE grand Desideratum on this subject then is: By what means may any, all, and especially the last and most difficult of these impediments be removed in part, or in whole?

IT is unnecessary to observe to the enlightened, that this cannot be effected by pompous Edifices, large Endowments; or indeed the most liberal establishments on the same plan, entirely, which has hitherto prevailed. In most of the states these already exist, as has already been observed, on a scale of liberality, that does honor to the country. But, has the defect

here alledged, been removed ; or even ameliorated in proportion to those beneficent exertions ? It is presumed not. Nay, it may be observed with regret that a public taste for munificence with respect to the style of Buildings and other external appendages, appears to predominate in preference to any rational plan or system that would tend to remove those obstructions which are most injurious to the interests of public Education.

It was observed to a late Primate or Metropolitan in the British Church, who had a predominating taste for building superb churches, that "his Grace had certainly much merit in decorating the face of the country with so many goodly Edifices ; but that it was a great pity, he was entirely negligent how they were filled ; or what sort of characters he commissioned to perform the service." I fear, that in respect to Education, an influenza, similarly delusive and vain as the Primate's is but too prevalent ; and from these considerations the following plan for promoting the improvement of the means of public Instruction in any one, or all of these states is most respectfully and with great deference submitted.

In each, or in any particular state let a Seminary be instituted on the following plan:—The object of which shall not be, as hitherto, to educate the Youth of the state, at least in the first instance or primary view ; but rather to instruct, encourage, aid and improve those who in every, or any, part of the state are at the head of a public School of any description of Education. Let this institution be denominated the Schoolmasters' College or Academy ; and laid off into three departments with suitable preparatory buildings in the most plain or simple style.

FIRST, The introductory department calculated chiefly for improving those who are engaged in what is commonly considered, an English Education ; to be placed under the direction of a professor of established reputation and talents.

SECOND, A classical or Belles Lettre-Department, under a professor of like talents and character with the above.

THIRD, A mathematical and philosophical Department or School, under a Professor of the greatest proficiency in the sciences; and most suitable talents for Instruction that can possibly be procured.—Each School or department to be liberally furnished with a suitable library and teaching apparatus; together with a Printing press for books to the institution; and the different seminaries and schools in the state that might choose to purchase them, when published, under the Direction of the Trustees and Professors of the Institution, for the emolument of the seminary.

THE present state colleges might, with great ease and propriety, be converted and reformed into institutions upon this plan. The additional expence would not be considerable. For though the principal object in founding the Schoolmasters' College, should be for the promotion of their improvement; yet, it might by no means be improper or inconvenient to admit as many youth, as commonly attend at the State Colleges. Indeed in some of the states at least, such a plan as this, appears necessary, in order to render their advantages to the community proportioned to their endowment. But with this additional improvement the benefits of the State College would be extended to every corner of the state, by its admission of all the public instructors of youth, occasionally, under the following regulations.

THAT every master of a public School who may have steadily employed himself in the business, for at least one year, in any part of the state, and brings credentials from his employers, and the nearest magistrate to his School, properly attested, to that effect, and also as to his morals, conduct and character, being uniformly such as becometh the Instructor of youth, should be admitted for a month or two,

annually, to the advantages of the Schoolmasters' College, in any or all of its departments; but especially in that, which might tend most to improve him in that grade of Education in which he had been employed—and wished to continue.

SHOULD the expence not be found impracticable, it would be well to have them provided with Boarding &c. at the College. But even the privilege of attending on its advantages, free from any expence for instruction, books and other apparatus; would be such an acquisition as would incline every one of them who had any taste for improvement to think little of the expence of their other accommodations for so short a time.

IN order to accommodate as many teachers as a state would furnish, it might be necessary to have the regulations so arranged, as that the state being divided into districts, the tutors in each district should attend at the season, alternately, allotted them for that purpose.—And to have their School vacations regulated, annually, so as to suit their respective periods of attendance.

THIS privilege being enjoyed and attended to for two successive years, it being certified to the Trustees and professors of the Schoolmasters' College that the Claimants had diligently and faithfully attended to the office of instruction, in the same place in which they had been originally employed, and recommended and introduced to the Board—and had maintained the same character during all the intermediate times of their attendance at College in their respective Schools; a Diploma should be awarded them, certifying their fitness for their profession in whatever part of Education they were best qualified; and recommending them to public patronage and support, by a publication of the deed in the public papers.

SOME enhancement of emolument should be conferred on every teacher who had merited it on this

plan, either by his subsequent employers ; or provided by the State for those of this description in each county, in the same manner in which provision is made, or intended to be made for public Schools. It might also be salutary for the promotion of the plan and the interests of Education, to provide by law for the better security of the emolument of such tutors of public Schools, as in conformity with these or similar regulations, embraced the benefits of the Plan.

SUCH are the outlines of this simple, and I trust far from impracticable Plan of Improvement in the means of *Public Instruction* ;—But it might require a more particular and full developement, to exhibit all the advantages that might, rationally, be expected from such a system in preference to any yet established. To enlightened minds, in any degree conversant with the subject of Education, or acquainted with its present state, it is presumed that this may be unnecessary. It appears to the writer of this Essay, after a long attention to the subject, as better calculated to promote the end it contemplates ; as well as more practicable on an extensive scale, than any hitherto adopted by any State or Nation of which he has any information.

ALL, or at least the most adverse impediments to public Education, as it concerns the whole of the community, would, by this plan, be, in a great measure, removed ;—And the advantages of a Seminary or College, extended to the humblest of the citizens wherever a public teacher could be employed.

By such an Institution means would be cherished ; and not only cherished, but secured, for forming the morals and virtuous deportment of not only the Youth ; but also for the habitual and exemplary good conduct of those into whose hands their instruction would be committed throughout the most remote corners of the commonwealth.

UNDER proper patronage, a standard, or at least a model of the most approved Education would be instituted, open for the instruction and improvement of those on whom, in a great measure, would depend the literary character of the state. The people, in any circumstances, would no longer complain of the burthen of contributing liberally to a Seminary from which, in every situation, they could not but derive such evident advantages as well as the more prosperous and opulent.

To some, the period allotted to the improvement of teachers, annually, may appear to be too short to produce the desired effect: But when it is considered that the leading object of the plan is to encourage them to persevere in their usefulness to society; and that they are not to be admitted when mere novices in that profession; but after some tried and approved services, to which they are again to return with renewed zeal and encouragement, the period, though short, may be sufficient for the purpose contemplated. Besides, it would open a channel of communication between them and the Professors of the Schoolmasters' College, through which they might, at all times, derive information in every part of their duty. A well conducted printing press for School-books would also be of great public benefit, as well as advantage to the institution.

PUBLIC teachers would, on this plan, consider themselves under the eye and patronage of the most enlightened characters in the state; and every passion or affection of their breasts would be operated on for producing the important object of the seminary.

IF consciousness of discharging the best duty in their power to society, constituted their highest or most satisfactory reward, by this plan they would find themselves gratified, by its tending to aid and encourage them in all their difficulties, and exertions for improvement in the line of their profession,

Or if interest and emolument were their object, this plan by its respectable recommendation of them to the public and other advantageous circumstances, would tend to enhance these in proportion to their talents or merit in the line of their profession. Such men would be thus raised to a more respectable as well as more useful grade in the social scale. The profession would become more honorable and encouraging, and the Education of our Youth, rescued from the abuse of the unprincipled profligate, ignorant lounge, or presumptuous empiric, would be placed in hands, in which the parents, in particular, and the public in general might most rationally confide. More certain means would be then provided for improvement in public Education than could be by an hundred Edifices, however munificently endowed, divested of any certain plan by which they might be supplied with proper professors.

It is probable that when this system came under the consideration of those best informed on such subjects, some defects might be discovered; and some amendments adopted; but as this is designed, merely, as a prospectus, it is presumed to be sufficiently explicit to convey an adequate idea of its import; or even exhibit its preference to any system of public Education yet established for providing for the instruction and literary improvement of the Youth of every description, in any state or commonwealth.

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## APPENDIX.

ON reviewing the preceding plan of Education it appears to be chiefly deficient in two things. The first is, in making no effectual provision for those tutors, who, being foreigners or strangers in the state where they reside, and out of employment, may be at a loss how to dispose of themselves to most advantage; or may be destitute of the means of availing themselves of the information, in that respect, of which they may be possessed.

THE second defect in the system appears to be that it holds out no efficient means by which such persons or places as would wish to be furnished with proper Instructors for their Youth, might procure the best information on a subject of such vast importance to themselves and their offspring.

To supply or remedy these two defects in the system, the plan of a new Seminary is here respectfully submitted to the patrons of Education, to be denominated, the **TEACHERS' ASYLUM**. As the preceding plan founds its principal claim to attention or patronage in the encouragement it holds out to able and faithful tutors, what is here proposed, properly becomes a part of the same institution.

IN addition then, to the **SCHOOLMASTERS' COLLEGE** or **ACADEMY** in each state, three Seminaries should be established, one in the state of New-York—one in Maryland or District of Columbia; and one in the most central part of the Southern states. Those three institutions to be denominated the **TUTORS' OR TEACHERS' ASYLUM**, should be endowed and furnished with proper professors, under the direction of Trustees; and calculated not only for the instruction of a certain number of Youth; but chiefly for the

reception of Tutors, bringing properly authenticated credentials of moral deportment ; as well as of their being previously employed in that profession. A temporary provision of Boarding and other accommodations of sustenance, and also literary improvement should be furnished them, whether natives or aliens, for the space of three months and no longer ; or till they could be advantageously disposed of in a suitable place of employment during that period.

IN those three Asylums a REGISTER should be kept of all vacancies within the respective bounds of the states which constituted the District of each, and contributed towards their endowment and support. All vacancies, of every grade, whether for private Tutors, public Schoolmasters, or academical Professors, should be transmitted to the principal of each ASYLUM in the respective districts, and entered in the REGISTER, for the purpose of communication to such as might apply for Teachers of any description.

THE great advantages of such a REGISTER, under such direction and regulations, is obvious—as well to the employers as the employed. Furnished with an extensive library, proper apparatus for experimental philosophy ; and above all with proper professors, under the appointment and patronage of the district which they served, they might not only afford Education to a considerable number of youth in their vicinity ; but also prove the happy means of frequently relieving suffering genius and merit ; and rescuing many useful teachers from embarrassment and distress.

IN those asylums, however, none should be received without fair credentials, as already stated ; save in cases peculiarly circumstanced, of which the Guardians of the institution, and its acting Professors should determine. Nor, should they be permitted to remain in the ASYLUM longer than three months, save in case of sickness : that being the period in which they could readily hold communication with any part of the district where their services might be called for.

It is more than probable, when the knowledge of such benevolent and liberal institutions reached that portion of Europe where, the best supply of tutors, with talents and integrity, most suitable to these states, might be expected, that it would encourage many of that description to emigrate to this country, and thus confer a double advantage on the Union—in all that tends to its improvement, population and prosperity.

WITH *some*, on whose minds improper prejudices had been formed, more by party spirit than real patriotism, this idea, like some others of a similar nature, may be treated with illiberality. With the *truly* patriotic, however, and such as are the most enlightened in the best interests of their country, freed from local partialities, it cannot fail being accredited as an encouraging consideration in the establishment of such an institution.

BY those ASYLUMS the citizens in every part of the Union might have the means of supplying themselves, at all times, with proper tutors;—And consequently have that time saved to the Youth, which is too often lost, by the very precarious manner in which teachers of any capacity are at present procured.

LET it not be supposed, that the cause of public Education can be effectually encouraged or supported without some plan for providing and training up proper persons, into whose hands its most essential Interests are to be committed. In every national system, of much less importance to the happiness and welfare of mankind, a similar principle is generally adopted. In manufactures, do not their essential interests depend on the skill and improvement of the persons chiefly employed in bringing them to the highest state of perfection? How would trade or merchandise be conducted without well trained Mariners to direct them over the pathless ocean? And can we expect that EDUCATION, as a National Interest

or blessing, can be conducted on any less judicious or liberal plan, than the more ordinary concerns of human life? Yet, it is a truth, that, even in the most enlightened nations, no institutions are yet founded, principally designed for the purpose of raising up and patronising those persons who are to be employed in forming the mind; and presiding over the moral and literary instruction of youth.

COLLEGES. Academies, or Schools of any kind, strictly speaking, cannot be considered of this description. These may and often do exist on a liberal scale of endowment, when they are either in want of proper professors; or if supplied, in too many instances, by such characters as are either unqualified illiterately; or immorally unworthy of the profession.

IT is allowed by all that the National Blessings of civil and religious liberty cannot be long secured to any people without the general diffusion of literary and useful knowledge. It is then hoped that the preceding sketches of a plan or institution, peculiarly favorable to this all important purpose, will be duly weighed and examined. If found to be in no respect impracticable; or extravagant beyond the reasonable liberality of a prosperous state or community, it is trusted they may not be permitted to sink into neglect or oblivion. The earnest desire is indulged, with confidence, that the obscurity of the author may not injure the introduction to society of a *favorite offspring*, which he has long previously cherished with enthusiasm ere it met the public eye—and that from the disinterested motive of its being serviceable to an equally beloved and respected community.

*Frederick Academy, 1st of October, 1803.*