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COMENIAN PANSOPHIC PRINCIPLES

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John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) is best known to the world as the pioneer of modern educational theories and methods. More particularly is he remembered as the author of a series of elementary Latin textbooks for which many generations of schoolboys in the by-gone days have called him blessed. But although he has richly deserved the praise he has received for his pedagogical reforms, that contribution by no means exhausts his astonishingly many-sided accomplishments. For he was the author of almost two hundred treatises (some of them rather forbiddingly bulky tomes, not all so far published), dealing with scientific, linguistic, pedagogical, philosophical, political, literary, and above all religious and theological subjects. He was likewise a fervent enthusiast for religious and political peace during one of the most disturbed periods of European history—the era of the Thirty Years' War. And above all, he was a convinced believer in pansophy—the principle of unification of all scientific, philosophical, political, and religious knowledge into one all-embracing, harmonious world-view. Previously, the term pansophy was used by Peter Laurenbeg (1585-1639) for an encyclopaedic compend of universal knowledge. Comenius gave it a deeper connotation, that of correlating all knowledge by means of an unifying principle. Thus he endeavored to produce an encyclopaedic, unified system of education which would fuse into one whole all knowledge, ethics, and religion, and by having all people educated in this system, would ultimately secure universal peace. His pansophy is, therefore, the dominant principle of almost everything he wrote, pervading it either explicitly or implicitly. Surprisingly enough, by reason of the recent discovery of Comenius' long lost pansophic *corpus*, we hope soon to learn more about this important aspect of his work than we have known hitherto.

After the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War Comenius was compelled to leave his home and family in Fulnek, Moravia, and to seek refuge on the estates of his powerful friend, Karl of Zerotin. Later (1629), he had to leave Bohemia altogether, and settled at Leszno in Poland. It was there that he began a serious study of the works of Francis Bacon (d.1626), which convinced him that the medieval authoritarian method of study was inadequate and faulty. This led him, in a way similar to that of Descartes, to seek principles upon which a new, inductive method of study could be based. The result was his pansophy.

In 1631 Comenius published his *Janua linguarum reserata* which

made him internationally famous almost overnight. He already had in mind the rudiments of his pansophic principle while he wrote the treatise. He adumbrated it in a private letter to his London friend, Samuel Hartlib (1595-1662), an enthusiastic supporter of all educational reforms and the "master of innumerable curiosities." Hartlib thereupon requested Comenius to give him a more precise idea of the intended work, a request with which Comenius promptly complied. But what was the latter's surprise, not to say consternation, when some months afterwards (1637) he received a package containing printed copies of his letter bearing the title *Connatum Comenianorum praeludia!* Thus the greatest project which Comenius had undertaken was launched by an unauthorized publication of his private letter. To be sure, the second edition of it (*Pansophiae prodromus*) was published with his consent. Nevertheless, even this slight indication of his intended pansophic project was received with favor, and even with enthusiasm, although there was criticism as well. In the treatise, Comenius detailed his objections to the grave faults with which the contemporary educational theory and practice abounded. At bottom, the fault lay in the study of mere words and consequent non-comprehension of the nature of things, or the lack of scientific method, as we would say. Comenius advocated an integration of all factual, inductively ascertained and verified knowledge into one encyclopaedic system. This system would be characterized by harmony and thus would eliminate the atomism and self-contradiction hitherto prevailing in human knowledge. The system rested on three sources of knowledge: study of nature (of objects themselves, rather than of books, or scientific study of nature); the use of reason in classifying and interpreting the data learned inductively; and an apprehension of moral and spiritual principles of the divine revelation in Scripture. Since all three ultimately derive from God, they must necessarily be capable of being harmonized with each other. If there appears to be a contradiction between religion and science, it is owing to our imperfect understanding of them. This is to be resolved by a careful comparison of one with the other, a method he called syncretistic. It was in his insistence on harmonizing and integrating religion with science that Comenius differed from such of his contemporaries as René Descartes, who, although enthusiastic about the Comenian pansophic project in principle, repudiated what he regarded as confusing science with theology. But Comenius continued to hold the conviction that the whole truth may be found only in a harmonious unity of nature, reason, and religion. This was pansophy, the aim of which was to instruct all men in what is necessary for a worthy human existence, including a clear awareness of man's destiny here and hereafter. Comenius believed that such knowledge may be attained with clearness and certainty—a notion which

reminds one of Descartes.

It may be useful, for a more effective understanding of the Comenian pansophic principle, to compare it with the essential thought of René Descartes, who, along with John Locke, is regarded as standing at the threshold of our modern era. As is well known, Descartes, too, completely rejects the entire previous method of ascertaining scientific and philosophical truth in order to construct for himself a new system based on critical principles. He starts, therefore, with a radical doubt. He next proceeds to establish principles of critical knowledge which he defines as clear and distinct ideas. As the result of this method, he arrives at three basic truths, or "simple natures." The first of these is the certainty that he, Monsieur Descartes, exists as a thinking being (not as a body); the second, that God exists, and is trustworthy; and the third, that the material world exists. Thus although Descartes censures Comenius for mixing science with theology, he does the same in asserting as one of the three indubitable truths that God exists. The real difference between him and Comenius is that the latter then proceeds to make use of this basic truth, while Descartes practically ignores it. For Descartes conceives of the natural world as a vast machine which, as a *perpetuum mobile*, has been put in motion by an act of God. But beyond this initial act, God is not needed, for the world is thenceforth governed by sufficient mechanical laws. Man, then, on his physical side is likewise a machine. Pascal was right when he wrote about Descartes: "I cannot forgive Descartes. He needs God only for giving a fillip to set the world in motion."¹ No wonder that by following the path blazed by Descartes much of our modern thinking has ended in secularism!

But now to return to Comenius: thanks to Professor Turnbull of the University of Sheffield, we possess today a much more detailed knowledge of the English group of scholars and reformers who interested themselves in Comenian reforms than we had six years ago. For he has utilized for his book, *Hartlib, Dury, and Comenius*,² a vast collection of Hartlib's letters discovered in 1933. Besides, he published recently Comenius' *Two Pansophic Works*.³ found among the manuscripts and hitherto unknown. In the first of these, *Praecognita*, Comenius again deals with his pansophic principles. He stresses there the necessity of the pansophic method, for thus alone may man learn the true significance of life. Otherwise, he is likely to acquire knowledge but not wisdom. He may know all about things, but not about his own spiritual destiny. Wisdom, i.e., knowledge of things as well as of spiritual ends of life, is the aim of pansophy.

The English circle comprised, besides Hartlib himself, two archbishops, four bishops, several scholars and scientists, a few members of Parliament, and several private friends.⁴ Hartlib had repeatedly in-

vited Comenius to England, but without success. It was not until 1641 that the latter was able to accept the invitation. He arrived in London on September 21, 1641, under the impression that it was the Long Parliament that had issued the request. Although it is clear from the Hartlib correspondence that the primary task expected of Comenius was the reform of the English school system, yet he thought that Parliament was interested in his pansophic plan as well. Since Parliament was not in session at the time of Comenius' arrival, he was persuaded, much against his inclinations, to stay until it reconvened. In the meantime, his English friends, particularly Bishop Williams, exerted strong pressure on him in an attempt to persuade him to remove to England permanently. This for reasons connected with his Church duties and his family he refused to do. Moreover, since the situation in London did not develop favorably, he grew disheartened about his English venture.

Nevertheless, during his stay in England Comenius explained his pansophic principle in a book entitled *Via lucis*.⁵ First of all, there was to be established in London a "pansophic college" which would serve as the research and directing center of the whole, widely ramified educational system. There was nothing particularly original about this feature of the plan. It had been advocated by Francis Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*. Comenius proceeded so far in his negotiations with Parliament that an actual assignment of one of three existing institutions—Savoy, St. Cross at Winchester, and Chelsea—was discussed, and the last-named appeared to be given preference. But unfortunately, the outbreak of the Irish rebellion (November, 1641) diverted Parliament's attention to urgent tasks arising out of it. Comenius thereupon left England, although without permanently giving up hope of resuming the interrupted plans. As one of Hartlib's correspondents expressed the disappointment to the English circle, "our Island is not yet worthy of that famous Oriental Professor."⁶

Via lucis details Comenius' concrete plans for the "pansophic college" that, in the first place, comprise the preparation of universal textbooks, embodying the pansophic principles. The aim of education, as defined here, is to train the pupil for an intelligent life. He must be enabled to learn "all things that are necessary for man for this and the future life to know, to believe, and to hope." Among other aspects of this task, the plan called for a coordinated digest of the learning of the past, for nothing is known unless it is known genetically, i.e., unless its development can be traced.

But to make these textbooks universally effective, there must exist a universal, free public school system of education. The curriculum of such schools would not be restricted to "secular" subjects, as is generally the case today. It would include everything needed for the

training of pupils for a life conscious of its spiritual ends.

In the third place, Comenius demanded a fresh creative approach to education. This he hoped to derive from continuous, organized research. It was this part of the pansophic plan which called for a centralized research foundation, a universal college, located conveniently in a country easily accessible to all. London was chosen as the seat of the president. But the members of the body would be scattered all over the world and would keep in touch with the president by frequent correspondence. All members would be supported by public funds, and would devote themselves exclusively to the furthering of the pansophic aims of the college.

In the next place, Comenius pursued a consciously international goal. Consequently, the textbooks must be written in a new, universal language, a kind of Esperanto. Latin was not regarded as quite adequate, for the new language must be completely regular. Moreover, Comenius had in mind the need for attaching a single, clear, and definite meaning to each word in the new language, in order to avoid ambiguity of concepts. He was thus something of a pioneer in semantics. Later he advocated the use of English and French as means of social intercourse, and—significantly enough—of Russian for the use of Eastern Europeans.

Furthermore, the pansophic system aimed at bringing about not only a unified system of universal education, but also at securing universal peace and religious unity.

Such, then, was the grandiose, perhaps utopian, plan entertained by the poor Czech exile who dared to dream it. As far as the English phase of it was concerned, it ended in failure, as we have seen. But he never abandoned it: single-handed, without the support of a body of scholars promised him in London, and often actually contrary to the wishes of his immediate employers, he persisted in his devotion to the ideal. The enormous task kept him busy to the end of his life.

He formulated this heroic determination in a small treatise written at Hartlib's request. It was entitled, in its English version, *Patterne of Universall Knowledge*. In 1645 he actually began the monumental work, *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica*. It was to comprise seven volumes. Only the first two volumes and the Dedication were published during his lifetime (in 1656). He appears to have deliberately postponed the completion of the remaining volumes. The reason for the delay was partly fear of criticism, which from some quarters was severe, but mainly his "perfectionism." He was never satisfied with what he had written, and was everlastingly improving it. Some scholars are of the opinion that these well-meant "improvements" were sometimes detrimental to the original works. For example, his *Methodus linguarum novissima* (1648-49) is regarded as

a less inspired and inspiring, because more laborious, reworking of his earlier *Ianua linguarum* and his *Didactica magna*.

Be that as it may; the five remaining volumes of his *Consultatio* were not completed by the time of his death (1670), and he commended the task to his son Daniel, and his former assistant, Christian Nigrin. Actually, it was Nigrin and Paul Hartmann who contributed to the manuscripts whatever additional work was done. Nevertheless, the volumes were never published. About the year 1700 all the manuscripts of the *Consultatio* came into the hands of one Justus Docemius, who placed them for safekeeping in the Orphanage at Halle a/d Saale. There they were consulted by Budde for his edition of the *Panegersia* (1702), but were thereafter completely forgotten, and have since been considered lost. It is one of the modern literary romances that in 1935 Professor Dimitry Chyzhevsky found the first six volumes, and in 1940 the seventh volume.⁷ But even then the disturbed condition of the time prevented the publication of these five hitherto unknown Latin parts. Only the volumes IV and VI were translated into Czech and published by the well-known Comenian expert, the recently deceased Professor Josef Hendrich.⁸

The *Consultatio* is, from the pansophic point of view, Comenius' most important work. But since it has been known only from an outline of the general plan sketched in the Dedication to the two published volumes, as well as from the two volumes, supplemented by scattered references in other treatises, it cannot be said to have been his most influential work. Thus his pedagogical books have constituted the principal claim to his fame. Moreover, until the remaining three of the newly discovered unpublished volumes are made available, our knowledge of the full scope of his pansophic principles must still remain incomplete. But what we already know justifies the positive assertion that all his other works are grounded in the pansophic presuppositions and cannot be fully understood without a competent knowledge of the latter.

The first two volumes, published during Comenius' lifetime, are really introductory to the principal parts which were to follow. They bear the titles *Panegersia* and *Panaugia*. The former of these, (The Universal Awakening), deals with the ground for the hope that human affairs, which had fallen into utter confusion, may be improved. For the world is one, human nature is the same everywhere; hence, all men are capable of being educated. Although confusion prevails in education, politics, and religion, a return to the original harmony is possible, and it is a high time that it be made. No time is to be wasted and no hesitation is to be indulged in. The specific tasks confronting men of good will comprise man's conquest of nature by means of scientific knowledge; universal peace among men; and the spiritual transforma-

tion of men's religious and ethical motivation.

The *Panaugia* (The Universal Dawn) seeks the means for enlightening the human mind. Such means are found in education. God has provided men with three books through which they may learn wisdom: nature, reason, and revelation (Scripture). Men may read these books by means of sense perception, intelligence, and faith. So far, many contradictions are to be found among them; but these may be removed through the syncretistic (comparative) method. What is lacking in one, may be supplied from the other two. Thus the whole truth is to be found only in a synthesis of all three sources of knowledge. Hence, "If in the future we explain in schools only the books of God, and use them in churches for the direction of conscience, and in states for the government of men, then it will not be possible not to see all things identically. . . ."⁹

The third part, *Pantaxia* (Universal Correlation) is identical with what Comenius formerly designated as *Pansophia*. In fact, the Halle manuscript bears the title "Pansophia, i.e., Universal Wisdom based upon Nature Itself." In it Comenius equates scientific knowledge with a description of things as they are, and with the arrangement of them in the proper order in relation to other things. Knowledge, therefore, depends upon our perception of the true nature, character, and order of the material phenomena. He then proceeds to an exposition of his philosophy and metaphysics in general.

The fourth volume, entitled *Panpaedia* (Universal Education), has fortunately been published in the Czech translation prepared by the late Dr. Hendrich. It presents Comenius' final reworking of his educational principles and methods, and as such should henceforth be taken into consideration in dealing with Comenian pedagogy. But that is not to affirm that this final version of his educational principles must necessarily supersede his earlier ideas: in fact, preliminary professional judgment are not entirely favorable. It is objected that the work is incomplete and, in comparison with the earlier pedagogical treatises, is over-systematized and over-schematized. But one suspects that this judgment reflects, at least in part, a rejection of the pansophic principle embodied in the *Panpaedia*. This final educational system of Comenius differs from his previous pedagogical works in so far as it extends the training from four to eight stages or phases of human life: while the *Great Didactic* divides the whole educational task into the kindergarden, elementary, secondary, and the university stages, the *Panpaedia* adds a pre-kindergarden and three adult stages, the latter comprising the School of Manhood, the School of Old Age, and a Preparation for Death. Thus Comenius aims at educating men from the cradle to the grave. The training is to make them intelligent both for this world and for eternity.

The fifth, *Panglottia* (Universal Language), is devoted to a discussion of the linguistic means best suited to convey the instruction to all the peoples of the earth. Comenius not only deals with the study of linguistics in general, but actually offers a sample of the new synthetic language. But until this part of the whole work is published, nothing more concrete can be said about it.

The sixth volume is, fortunately, available in translation, and hence a more detailed description of its contents is possible. It bears the title of *Panorthosia* (Universal Reform), and as such is particularly pertinent to our principal interest in Comenius' pansophic principle. The book discusses the chaos caused by the lack of education, irreligion (we would perhaps say, secularism), bad government, and social evils. Comenius then makes concrete proposals for the removal of these evils; some of them echo his previously publicized schemes, but others are new.

In order to understand these proposals more clearly, for they are likely to sound utopian to our sober ears, we must remind ourselves that Comenius was a convinced chiliast. He believed in the imminent return of Christ to earth, and the consequent establishment of Christ's thousand-year reign. This event was to occur during the seventh millennium of the world's existence, and he believed that the year 1655 constituted the actual beginning of the seventh millenium. Hence, he was able to convince himself that under the immediate reign of Christ, reforms that were unthinkable previously, could actually be expected. Consequently, his calculations appear utopian because they are utopian.

Since Comenius consistently thinks of the universal reform under three aspects—cultural, political, and religious—he proposes as the principal instruments of reform three organizations: the Council of Light, which constitutes the ruling cultural body; the Court of Justice, which represents the highest judicial and political tribunal and the Ecumenical Consistory, the governing body of the Universal Church.¹⁰

The Council of Light is charged with the stupendous task of educating the entire human race. Consequently, it has supervision of all schools and teachers. It must establish pedagogical principles and methods valid for the world, prepare and distribute textbooks for the schools, exercise censorship over all books and publishers. All textbooks must embody the pansophic principles. Hence, non-Christian books are "profitless." But not all books written by Christian authors are acceptable; some are surcharged with secularist points of view. Furthermore, Christian books of former times are, as a rule, inadequate for modern use. Since the task of the Council of Light is global, the language employed by the body must likewise be universal. But this applies only to the intercourse at the highest level. Local schools would use the vernacular. Every village would possess an elementary school, every city elementary and secondary schools, and every country one or more uni-

versities.

As for the Court of Justice, that institution is charged with the oversight of courts, judges, codes of law, civil administration, and everything which is conducive to the preservation of peace and justice. As Comenius pithily formulated it, "What is the aim of politics? Peace with all men, so that no harm be done to anyone."¹¹ Hence, all men possess equal rights before law, and an equal chance to secure a living and happiness. The ultimate aim is to secure universal peace, as far as possible without the use of force. Accordingly, all humankind must submit to the rule of law. Furthermore, all men must transcend their narrow nationalism, such as being "an Austrian, a Spaniard, a Frenchman . . . but all be good citizens, members of the free state of the world."¹²

The Ecumenical Consistory, representing the unity of all Christian communions, counts among its duties the care of all the churches, of their ministers, and of religious literature. First of all, then, the unity of all existing separate bodies must be attained: this has been Comenius' endeavor throughout his life. He insists that all non-essential differences among Christians be eliminated: he deprecates the use of party names, such as the Lutheran, Calvinist, or Roman Catholic.¹³ To that end he suggests a "via media" in theology for the removal of such stumbling blocks among the various theological camps as are the differing interpretations of the doctrines of the procession of the Holy Spirit, of justification by faith alone, of the sacraments, and of predestination.¹⁴ The true "catholic" Christianity comprises everything that God has revealed, has commanded, and has promised to *all* His children. It is characterized by but few dogmas, a simplicity of rites, and strictness of self-discipline. "Religious theory should be short, its practice life-long, its results eternal."¹⁵ Among the duties of the Ecumenical Consistory, then, is the care for providing an adequate number of churches and ministers for the needs of all peoples. Likewise, provision must be made for the availability of Scripture in all the languages of the world. Besides, commentaries, topical and verbal concordances, and a textbook of biblical theology, must be prepared. Missionary work both at home and abroad, characterized by persuasion rather than the use of force, must be undertaken.

Each of these three tribunals is to be presided over by one person; but every continent is to have a regional presiding officer as well. But aside from these three organizations, there is to be organized one Universal Council,¹⁶ which is to meet at least once in ten years and would consist of three delegates from each nation—a scholar, a statesman, and a theologian. This general gathering would be convened by the heads of governments, who would likewise provide for its expenses. The time of the holding of such a meeting is specified as "immediately

after the defeat of Gog," a remark which clearly reveals Comenius' chiliastic beliefs. It would inaugurate, in a solemn manner, the millennial Kingdom of Christ. The actual deliberations of the Council would be carried on in common, and would not be divided among the three constituent groups—the cultural, political, and religious. The utopian nature of Comenius' speculations are so clearly apparent that it is not necessary to point them out.

The seventh and concluding volume, *Pannuthesia* (The Universal Admonition), is addressed to "the men of light," the learned men of the world, scientists, teachers, religious leaders, and statesmen. In this exhortation Comenius lays emphasis on the truth which is as greatly neglected in our day as it was in his, namely, that the spiritual transformation and reform is primary, and the environmental reform is secondary in the sense that it follows, not precedes, the former. Comenius admonishes these "men of light" that it is their duty to disseminate right ideas. He reminds them that it is the nature of light to penetrate darkness, to spread enlightenment. Education lays upon its possessors the duty to pass it on. Moreover, there is a veritable "*terra incognita*" before humankind, which awaits discovery. How surprised would Comenius be if he could witness the tremendous mechanical progress of our day; but disappointed that this progress has not been accompanied by the kind of wisdom which to him was the supreme aim of education! Nevertheless, he asserts that what has been done up to this time is a mere gleaning, *not* the real harvest. The harvest is yet to come! His "point four" of the pansophic program is the enlightenment of the hitherto barbarous races, which must be made partakers of the cultural riches with the culturally more mature races. And he concludes by saying that this stupendous world-wide cultural program must be realized by means of humble, voluntary, zealous, and peaceful commitment to the task on the part of "the men of light."

In conclusion, let us raise the pertinent question as to the results of Comenius' lifelong labors and devotion: has it all ended in a noble failure? Much of it undoubtedly has, for it partook of the transient which characterizes every age. He had the misfortune, which is shared by many great men, of entertaining grandiose ideals which outrun the pedestrian minds of their contemporaries. Some of his basic principles have been rejected by our modern world either unconsciously or deliberately. Descartes has proved far more influential for our age than Comenius. Integration of religion into general scientific and political culture has been largely ignored, if not repudiated. The result is secularism, which has reached in some instances the acute stage of militant atheism. We rely on political, economic, or scientific means for the creation of a good world: by implication we deny the truth which Comenius stressed, that the task is primarily spiritual.

But many of Comenius' contributions, fortunately, have proved practical and realizable. In the pedagogical reforms his proposals are generally recognized. But the tragic loss of the five volumes of his *Consultatio* has deprived him of the credit for having been the pioneer of even greater reforms. Nevertheless, many have already been initiated, even though under different auspices. The ideal of universal popular education is fast becoming a reality. It is *not* unified in the way proposed by Comenius, but that is its defect rather than its merit. The Unesco somewhat feebly adumbrates his far more effectively conceived Council of Light. But we must be grateful even for these small accomplishments. In the realm of political unification, we have made a beginning of the concept of "one world" by the organization of the United Nations and of the Permanent International Court of Justice, as well as by the Charter of Human Rights. Linguistically, English and French have increasingly become the media of universal communication. Perhaps, Russian may likewise come into considerable use. As for the religious unification, although it is no more perfect than the political, yet even there an astonishing progress has been made during the more than three and a half centuries since Comenius's birth: for most of the Protestant and some of the Eastern Orthodox communions have united in organizing the World Council of Churches of Christ. Thus ideas which in Comenius' time seemed fantastic and utopian, have actually assumed concrete forms. Their present state is undoubtedly marred by many and huge faults, but nevertheless they have taken on reality, imperfect though it be. It is a pity that the loss of Comenius' pansophic writings has deprived him of a more direct influence upon these great accomplishments of our time. But at least we know that he deserves credit for his devotion in shaping them into concrete proposals at a time when very few were ready to accept them. Hence, Comenius *was* a pioneer of the new world, the dim outlines of which even to this day we see as in a glass, darkly, but which we hope shall be ultimately realized.

1. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, (New York, Modern Library, 1941), par. 77.
2. G. H. Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius* (Liverpool, The University Press, 1947).
3. G. H. Turnbull, ed., *Two Pansophical Works of J. A. Comenius* (Prague, 1951).
4. For a more detailed statement, cf. my *John Amos Comenius* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1943), ch. V.
5. J. A. Comenius, *The Way of Light*, tr. E. T. Campagnac (Liverpool, The University Press, 1938).
6. Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius*, 362.
7. *Archiv pro bádání o životě a spisech J. A. Komenského* Brno, (1940), 85-107.
8. Josef Hendrich, tr., *J. A. Komenský, Vše výchova* (Prague, 1948); *J. A. Komenský, Všenáprava*, (Prague, 1950).
9. Josef Hendrich, tr. *Všenáprava*, 121.
10. Hendrich, tr., *Všenáprava*, ch. XV.
11. *Ibid.*, 191.
12. *Ibid.*, 151.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 126-34.
15. *Ibid.*, 188.
16. *Ibid.*, ch. XXV.