## CLASS FORCES

in the

DEVELOPMENT

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FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION

in the U.S.

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## CLASS FORCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF

FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

By Doxey A. Wilkerson

(Excerpt from an unpublished manuscript prepared in 1940; covering the period from early 17th Century to mid-19th Century)

Earliest American education was imported from Europe and continued in the tradition of its aristocratic heritage. Its dominant social function was the "preservation of religious faith and the existing social and economic order." (1) The two main forces determining the character of schools were institutionalized religion and the class structure of society. Further, any distinction between these two is more apparent than real. (2) The protestant sects, both in New England and the Middle Colonies, recruited their clergy chiefly from the privileged groups in society, and in turn were supported by the more substantial farmers, planters and merchants. In the New England colonies there was "virtual identity of the dominant religious group with the ruling class," giving rise to a Puritan plutocracy which reigned until late in the 17th Century. (5) In Virginia, and the Southeast, where adherents of the English National Church were motivated by material rather than religious interests, the class structure of society was particularly marked. It was here that indentured white servitude, and later Negro slavery, were especially to flourish. Here, likewise, did the plantation economy emerge, (4)

Consistent with the structure of colonial society, there were two distinct schemes of education, one for children of the well-to-do, and another for children of the common people. The former began their education with tutors, in endowed "public schools" or in such other private institutions as the "dame schools" of New England. Secondary schools were fashioned after the English grammar school designed to prepare boys of the "better classes" for college. The Massachusetts Law of 1647, for example, in addition to requiring each town with fifty families to appoint a teacher for "all such children as shall resort to him to write and reade." ordered further that any town with 100 families

> shall set up a grammar school ... to instruct youth so farr as they shall be fitted for we university. (5)

These New England Latin schools were never popular institutions. Rather. they were "conceived, supported, and percetuated by the few," (6) In Virginia, the sons of planters who were to sail abroad to college or enter William and Mary nearby were usually prepared for admission by family tutors or at the few private schools kept by clergymen. (7) Colleges, of course, were far removed from the common people, and were attended only by the sons of professional, merchant, and planting classes. (8) By the 17th Century it had become "proper" for country gentry and rich merchants to send their sons to Oxford and Cambridge as a matter of "decorum and reputability."(9) Preparation for careers as preachers, orators, statesmen, doctors, lawyers, or "gentlemen" defined the immediate goals of education for sons of the favored classes. (10)

In the light of the education provisions for the well-to-do, those for orphans, children of indentured servants, and children of the poor reveal the "class character of colonial education ... in starkest outline."(11) The predominating practice, consistent with the tradition of the English "Poor Laws," was to bind out as apprentices the children of the common people. Illustrative is the Massachusetts Law of 1642. Not only did it charge overseers of a given town with responsibility to supervise the education of youth, especially as regards "their ability to read Original both Original both UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT

& understand the principles of religion & the capitall lawes of this country," but also gave them

power.... to put forth apprentices the children of such as they shall find not able & fitt to imploy and bring them up. (12)

Indentures for apprenticeship were sometimes voluntary, as in the case of one Jonathan Stoughton, of Connecticut, who, in 1727, with his father's consent

...hath put him selfe an apprentice to Nathan Day....; blacksmith and white smith to Learn his art, trade or mystery after the manner of an Apprentice to serve him until the sd Jonathan Stoughton attains the age of twenty-one years....(13)

Frequently, however, indentures were compulsory. In 1747, for example, the "selectmen" of Leicester, Massachusetts, "with the assent of two of his Majesties Justices of the Peace," entered into an agreement to

... bind out to the sd. Matthew Scott & to his Beirre Executors & and Admires as an Apprentice Roses Lore a Hinton aged two years and Hight months with him & them to live & deell with as an apprentice him and the state of the

Apprenticeship itself yielded distinct educational outcomes, especially along lines of vocational training. Further, in day and evening schools the year apprentices were usually taught to read, to write, to eigher, and, of ocurse, to "understand the principles of religion at the capital lines;" In the New Hagiand colonies, other the property of the principles of the pri

Dequestionably, religious and humanitarian motives contributed to such administrations as were used for the poor, Adequate Interpretation of those previsions, however, must recognise their tirred, and portugal more fundamental, more considerable to the provided for the training of a much-needed class of artisens, and freed the wise provided for the training of a much-needed class of artisens, and freed the well-to-do from much of the burden of pupur relief, Further, 1 to contributed to the test of the provided for the training of a much-needed class of artisens, and freed the well-to-do from much of the burden of pupur relief, Further, 1 to contribute to the value of the provided for the second of the provided for the provided

Thus, in its control, structure and content, early American education was well-accommodated to the dominant religious influences and class divisions of the society it served. Even the concept of free public schools in the modern sense seemed not to have been born.

The idea of elementary or for that matter, secondary or collegiate schools supported by taxation, freed from clerical control and offering instruction to children of all classes, found no expression in colonial America. (17) In preparing "favored youth for the church or the semi-cultured life of the great planation," and the children of the dependent poor for dutiful service both to God and their earthly "Masters," Colonial education tended to perpetuate class distinctions. Clearly, it was education to support the then existing social order. (18)

The immediate effect of the American Revolution upon education was disastrous. Most rural and parochial schools were closed. By the end of the War, colleges were generally impoverished. Between 1785 and 1789, when the new state faced a critical struggle upon which its very existence hung, little or no attention was paid to education. (19) But once independence had been consolidated into what promised to be an abiding political structure, there emerged a new interest in education, and especially in its relations to social organization. (20)

The theorists of the new national state all addressed themselves to the problem of education. Scores of books and pamphlets appeared "on the function of education in the new social order." All deplored the impoverished schools and poor teachers inherited from the earlier period. All argued for a national system of popular education, universal in extent (some would even include girls), supported by general taxation, and running from elementary school to the university. (21) Robert Coram wrote:

> It is a shame, a scandal to civilized society, that part only of the citizens should be sent to colleges and universities to learn to cheat the rest of their liberties. (22)

As summarized by the Beards, these 18th Century critics held that

the prime end of education was to help realize the ideals of progress, raise the general level of well-being, bring all citizens within the range of cooperative life, apply science to the service of mankind, prepare pupils for economic independence, instruct them in the duties of citizenship, instill in them republican principles, strengthen and enrich American nationality, (23)

Such education principles as these gave valid expression to the democratic premises which emerged from the American Revolution. Yet, the theorists who gave them birth were generations ahead of their day. Much more practical considerations were to define the actual conditions of education during the first three decades of national life.

The early period of the new Republic was especially characterized by rule of the aristocratic class, Washington, Madison, Hancock, Adams, Hamilton, Jay - all were substantial representatives of the well-to-do. The Federalist Party, political instrument of the privileged class, remained dominant until after the turn of the Century. Suffrage was restricted to the propertied few. (24) The Prench Revolution had "awakened the masses of mankind throughout the world." and "the aristocracy was badly frightened." It "prophesied the end of civilization, if the advance of the populace could not be halted." (25)

> Even such broad-minded men as Daniel Webster in Massachusetts and Chancellor Kent in New York feared the results of universal suffrage, and opposed the movement. Webster held that under universal suffrage the wealth of individuals would be subject to "the rapaciousness of a merciless gang," while Chancellor Kent likened manhood suffrage to a mighty engine which would "destroy property, laws, and liberties." (26)

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It is within this framework that one must view the conditions of education during the period immediately following the American Revolution.

The Federal Constitution, "though framed by the shlest sen of the time, was framed by now the represented the old artiscreptic conception of education and government." [27] It was adopted by states in which "less than one-fifth of the entire white and population... enjoyed the right to vote." [26] It is not surprising, therefore, that the new Constitution was completely silent on the question of education. So likewise with the early state constitutions of the lio rance tate constitutions dream up between 17f6 and 1500, all but the wave equally silent states that forming the Blots makes the constitutions attack that forming the Blots makes the constitutions, and most of the education clauses in the other constitutions were but general declarations encouraging learning and virtue. [36]

By and large, up to shout 1800, the pattern of education remained much the same as during colonial days. [31] The one outstanding development of the period was the rapid growth of accdemies. Began in the sid-10th Century in protest which at time received one aid from public fruinds. Flourished under private sumpless which hit for the tuition and "patronage of some and daughters of serchants and framers the could not hope to attend institutions of higher education." Thus, they provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherto untouched siddle many they provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherto untouched siddle provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherto untouched siddle provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherto untouched siddle provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherto untouched siddle provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherto untouched siddle provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherton to Course, and the provided secondary education for an emerging and the provided secondary education for an emerging and the provided secondary education for an emerging and Thitherton to Course, and the provided secondary education for an emerging and for experiment and the provided secondary education for an emerging and the provided secondary education for an emerging and the provided secondary education for an emerging and the provided secondary education for an emission for an emission for an emissi

The Revolution had aroused "democratic enthusiasm for the rights of man" and the frontier "was contributing substantially to a liberalization of suffrage, an equalization of opportunity, and a more democratic outlook everywhere." Yet, education lagged, and "only faintly responded to the ideas of '16."

> Had the more radical elements dominated during the formative years of the new republic, it is possible that the caste character of the schools might have been undermined...But the conservatives stabilized their privileges and built the state, and although education theory did reflect the forevor of our stability than the schools of the schools of the schools of the stantially change its class character, (33) and

Many influences contributed to a revival of interest in education during the first half of the 19th Century. The Sunday School Novement, the City School Societies, the Monitorial System, and the Infant School Societies were especially important. (34) Nach more fundamental, however, were the social, economic and political developments of the time.

The middle period was characterized by the rapid development of manufacturing, and in consequence, the rapid growth of cities. The new type of factory work pressaged the end of home and village industries, together with the system of apprenticeship. The rising industrialists ease inneressingly to challenge the power of the older aristorsary. These emerged a new and articulate proletarist, especially in the citica sings the semboard.

Once the industrial revolution was fairly started, its effects upon outlure, were suit and comunitare. Under its stresses and strains the whole social structure was recent. To the old more macrous fortunes error from textiles, steel, hardware, pottery and reliways. There were now large family estates to constant of the property of the stresses of t

be taxed for popular education....As the shadow follows the sun, so in the wake of the expanding middle class came the ever-swelling industrial proletariat with its tendencies or radical opinion concerning society and government. (35)

The Federalist Furty, which had lost control of Jeffersonian Democracy in 1801, ceased to exist as a national party in 1817. After 1815, when only four states granted the right to vote to all male white citizens, and especially after 1800, there developed a strong democratia nowment to abolish the property qualifications for suffrage which had long supported the rule of the old articovary. As a consistency of the result of the contraction of the suffrage which had long supported the rule of their deficient of the Union (186) From Washington to Adams, each president had represented the old articovary. But the nextly aroused masses were now impatient with the claims of upper-class superiority. Full membod suffrage gave the Western farmers and the urban working classes a new preponderance of influence in the affairs of government. They used it in 1828 to class "a sum of the people" as frestdent. (97) the rise of poulse reversages and of concluse education.

"For a nation of farmers and sechanics, bent on self-government and possessed of the beliot, there was only one kind of educational program is negliguith self-respect, namely, a free and open public school system supported by taxation and non-sectarian in control," [53] This, together with their alies, twy set out to attain, but their goal lay along the path of prolonged agitation, propagaments, and persistent strucks.

The aristocracy of wealth was justly fearful over the new popular threat to its security. "The unruly not that invaded the Mitte Bouse shem Jackson was inaugurated in 1829 seemed to symbolize a new power," [9] which must be curred. Streamously, of course, did they oppose the increasing demand for free, tax-supports of the course, the course, the course of the course of the course, and they seem the course of the course

Public school legislation was characterized as "impractical, visionary, and too advanced." Besides, "no State could long meet such a lavish drain of resources" as would be entailed by general education. Government, it was claimed, "Mand or right to interfere between a parent and his children in the matter of cheating." It would be improper for government to injure the "wested rights established by the anoney which had gone into private and purcedial schools, Poblic black by the more which had gone into private and purcedial schools, Poblic of the company of the company

Excerpts from two editorials which appeared in the Philadelphia National Gazette during the summer of 1830 illuminate considerably the dominant class character of opposition to free public schools.

It is our strong inclination and our obvious interest that literary acquirements should be universal; but we should be guilty of imposture if we professed to believe in that consummation. Literature cannot be acquired without leisure, Deputed by GOOGIC

and wealth gives lefaure. Intureral opulence, or even competency, is a chingra, as man ad society are constituted. There will ever be distinctions of condition, of capacity, of knowledge and ignorance, in spite of all the fond conceits which may be included, or the wild projects which may be tried, to the contrary. The "peasant" must labor during the hours of the day, which his wealthy neighbor can give to the abstract culture of his mind; otherwise the surfavouring the result enough for the substituces of all; the mechanic current if he should, most of the coverencess of life and objects of exchange would be wanting; languar, decay, powerty, and discontent would soon be visible among all classes. (42)

The beginning of the second editorial is strongly suggestive of a muchused slogan of present-day American politics.

It is an old and sound remark, that government cannot provide for the necessities of the People; that it is tay who maintain the government, and not the latter the People. Who the control of the description which the state or national councils cannot supply, except partially and in limited degree. They may endow public schools for the indigent, and colleges for the most comprehensive and coatly schemes of instruction. Classes...is shown the province and power, (43)

Though of little practical consequence, it is of theoretical significance that the utopian socialists of that day gave support to the cause of reaction. In 1829 for example, one pre-Marxian "left-wing" labor leader in New York attacked the claims that free public schools would redound to the economic benefit of the workers. He "charged the Manns and Barnards with putting the eart before the horse.'

...let all remember that those who undertake to hold back the people from their rights of property...until education, as they call it, can first be communicated...etither do not understand themselves, or pursue the course they are pursuing, for purpose of diverting the people from the possession of the property of the property of the property of the longer. (49)

among the champions of the public school revenent were pillunthrojats and humanitariums, "public em or large vision," righteend Protestants (especially Calvinital) who viewed with slare the increased flood of Catholic innigrants from Iroland and the Continent, and especially the newly entremobiled framers in a result of the continent of the con



Various proponents of free schools sought contrasting social goals through the segis of general education, and their arguments differed accordingly. Of especial significance in this regard is the contrast between professional eduentors and organized labor.

Not educators argued for the education of the masses as an instrument to inculcate moral virtues and "mespect for law and order," to prevent the "man-clastic dissolution of republican society", and to "pressote industrial prosper-classic dissolution of republican society", and to "pressote industrial prosper-classic section of the sec

What surer guaranty can the capitalist find for the security of his investments, than is to be found in the sense of a community morally and intellectually enlightened? (49)

Similar in its appeal to merchants and industrialists was the query of Caleb Mills.

Would he (the merchant) finds so large a share of his profits engulfed in the whirlpool of bad debts, if the people were honest? Can the manufacturer invest his eaptful with equal security among an imporant and victous people, than he would in an intelligent and virtuous community? (50)

John Armstrong, in 1833, warned a North Carolina audience that:

When Revolution threatens the overthrow of our institutions, everything depends upon the character of the people. If they are ignorant, they will surrender themselves to the control of their passions, and submit to be guided by noisy political families. (51)

So likewise did Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, perhaps the greatest apostles of free schools, emphasize the values of mass education to the financial interests of their day. Mann, even though a severe critic of the sins of industrial earlialsm. Sought to show that

education has a market value; that it is so far an article of merchandise, that it may be turned to pecuniary account; it may be minted, and will yield a larger amount of suitable coin then common bullion. (52)

The more conservative Barnard went even farther. Not only did be make "appeals to men of wealth to support education in their own interest and to further their own security," but he included in his "Object of Teaching" a catechian "designed to help the teacher provide the proper economic truths (i.e. the blessings of capitalism) to workers and their children. (5)

Unlike the educators, who appealed to the self-interest of eapttalists in support of the status quo, organized workers demanded free public schools as a matter of republican "rights." The 1830 Report of the Working-Men's Committee of Fhiladelphia, a lengthy document based upon months of investigation, decreted

the inadequate provisions for public instruction throughout most of the State, denounced the pauper-school system as "incompatible with the rights and liberties of an American citizen," criticized the existing public school system for the "limited amount of instruction it affords," and set forth this challenging statement of democratic educational principle.

The original element of despottsm is monopoly of talent, which consigns the multitude to comparative ignorance, and secures the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich and secures the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich and the side of the side of the rich and the side of the sid

A resolution adopted at a General Meeting of Mechanics and Workingmen held in New York City, in 1829, resolved,

that next to life and liberty, we consider education the greatest blessing bestowed upon mankind;

and resolved, further,

that the public funds should be appropriated (to a reasonable extent) to the purpose of education upon a regular system that shall insure the opportunity to every individual of obtaining an competent education before he shall have arrived at the age of maturity. (55)

A meeting of workingmen held in Philadelphia in the same year, protested that:

No system of education, which a freeman can accept, has yet been established for the poor; whilst thousands of dollars of the public money has been appropriated for building colleges and academies for the rich. (56)

Rather than appeal to the self-interest of the wealthy for free public schools, this newly enfranchised industrial proletariat demanded action by its elected representatives. In 1850 in Boston, a meeting of "Workingmen, Mechanics, and others friendly to their interests," resolved:

that the establishment of a system of education, attainable by all, should be along the first efforts of every lawgiver Who desires the continuance of our national independence. (57)

That same year, an Association of Workingmen formed in New Castle, Delaware, incorporated into its constitution this appeal for political action:

> Let us unite at the polls and give our wotes to no candidate who is not pledged to support a rational system of education to be paid for out of the public funds. (58)

For this work of propaganda hundreds of School Societies, Lyceums, and Educational Associations were organized; many conventions were held, and resolutions favoring state Dispute by ADDICE

sobols were adopted; many "Latters" and "Addresses to the Public "were virties and published; public-spirited citizens traveled over the country making addresses to the people and explaining the advantages of free state schools;...many governors sent communications on the subject to legislatures each meeting of the legislatures for purars a delige of recolutions, memorials, and petitions for and against free schools met the members. (59)

The outcome of this "mattle for Free Schools" are generally moon. It you means established universal public education, but, at least in the Horn, a tynificant progress was made. The pusper-school idea was writually eliminated, thus undermining the colonial heritage of class schools.

The pusper colonial heritage of class schools with a subject of the pusper colonial heritage was a subject of the pusper. The principles of tax-support and state control were firmly established. There emerged two new and treemfoundly significant types of educational institutions, the free public high school and the state university. "It extends the control was a subject to the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. "It extends the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. "It extends the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. "It extends the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. "It extends the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. "It extends the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. "It extends the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. "It extends the colonial school and the state university." It extends the colonial school and the state university. The colonial school and the state university. The colonial school and the state university is a school and the state university. The colonial school and the state university is a school and the state university. The school and th

The ant-bellum educational advances unbred in by political descracy in the agricultural leat and the industrial Bast were but meaperly shared in the South. With but few cittes and little manufacturing, laggard in the extension of full white smandow sufrage, seturade by the institution of slavery, still "dominated...by the planting aristoracy and removed from the main currents of science that the still represent the same of the same currents of science than the same of the same and with classical instruction as the basis of collegiate learning." [61] Such few educational beginnings as had been made were shattered by the Civil Nur. [62]

Although major attention is given in the next chapter to post-war educational developments in the South, at least two general truths merit recording here. In the first place, precisely as in the North, only with the general entrunchiseter of the second of the sec



## POOTNOTES

- Curti, Merle, The Social Ideals of American Educators. New York; Charles Scribner's Sons. 1935. p.4 ff:
- 2. Ibid.
- 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid., also Beard, Charles A., and Beard, Mary R., The Rise of American Civilization. New York: MacMillan, 1935. Vol. I, pp.166-180; also Cubberly. Ellwood P., Public Education in the United States. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1934.
- 5. Cubberly, Ellwood P., Readings in Public Education in the United States. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1934, p.19
- 6. Quoted by Curti, op.cit., p.22; see also Cubberly, Public Education in the United States, op.cit., p.255
- . Beard and Beard, op. cit. p.176
- 8. Curti, op.cit.; Cubberly, op.cit. 9. Beard and Beard, op. cit., p. 167; also Cubberly, op.cit.
- 10. Beard and Beard, op.cit., p.181. (As the Beards, and others, also point out, girls, though admitted to the elementary schools to learn to read, the catechism, and perhaps some arithmetic, were excluded as a matter of course from the grammar schools and colleges. They received no higher education unless it be offered by a family tutor. P.181)
- 11. Curti, op.cit., p.23 12. Cubberly, Readings in Public Education in the United States, p.17
- 13. Ibid., p.40
- 14. Ibid., p.41
- 15. Curti, op. cit.,; Beard and Beard, op.cit., pp.176-182; Cubberly, op.cit. 16. The words of a contemporary, as quoted in Curti, op.cit., p.23
- 17. Beard and Beard, op.cit., p.177
- 18. Curti, op. cit., p. 23 19. Cubberly, op. cit., p.82
- 20. Beard and Beard, op.cit., p.486; also Curti, op. cit., p.581
- 21. Beard and Beard, op. cit. pp.486-487 22. Ibid., p.487
- 23. Loc. Cit.
- 24. Cubberly, op. cit. pp.150-151
- 25. Counts, George S., The Prospects of American Democracy. New York: John Day Company, 1938, p.112
- Cubberly, Public Education in the United States, op.cit.p.151 (footnote)
   Ibid., p.150
- 28. Reisner, E.H., The Evolution of the Common School, p.273 (Quoted by Cubberly, Ibid., p.150 footnote) 29. Cubberly, op. cit. p.94. (The two exceptions were Rhode Island and Connecticut.)
- 30. Ibid., pp.94-95 31. Ibid., pp.94-111
- 32. Beard and Beard, op. cit., p. 494; see also Cubberly, op.cit., pp.112-17 33. Curti. op.cit.p.24
- 34. Cubberly, op.cit.pp.120-142
- 35. Beard and Beard, op.cit., pp.725-726
- 36. By 1845, five additional eastern states had extended the same full voting privileges to their citizens, and "the old requirements had been materially modified in most of the Nothern states." Cubberly, op.cit. p.151, also pp.142-52.

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- 37. Ibid., pp. 152-53
- 38. Beard and Beard, op.cit. p.810 39. Curti, op.eit. p.51
- 40. Cubberly, 1bid, p.165
- 41. Ibid. p.166



## POOTNOTES (Cont.)

- 42. Cubberly, Readings in Public Education in the United States, op.cit. pp.167-168
  43. Ibid, p.168
- 44. Curti, op. cit. pp.90-95, 198
  45. Beard and Beard, op.cit., pp.810-811; Cubberly, Public Education in the United States, op. cit., p.164; Curti, op.cit., p.198
- States, op. cit., p.164; Curti, op.cit., p.198
  46. Cubberly, Public Education in the United States, op.cit. pp.165-66
- 47. Curti, op. cit. p.60 ff. 48. Ibid. pp.77-78.94
- 48. Ibid. pp.77-78,94 49. Ibid. p.80
- 50. Ibid., p.82 51. Ibid. p.80
- 52. Ibid. p.112
- Cubberly, Readings in the History of Public Education in the United States, pp.160-61
- 54. Cubberly, op. cit. pp.160-61 (Readings) 55. Cubberly, op. cit. p.173 (Public Education)
- Cubberly, op. eit. p.173 (Public Education
   Ibid.
- 57. Ibid. p.174
- 58. Ibid.
- Ibid., p.167
   Beard and Beard, op.cit., p.815; see also Cubberly, op.cit., p.281 and Curti, op.cit., p.199
- 61. Beard and Beard, op.cit., p.814 62. Cubberly, op. cit., pp.408 ff.
- 63. Cubberly, op.cit. pp.435 ff. 64. Cubberly, op. cit. pp.664 ff.