

## CHAPTER IX

## ALL THE YOUNG OF BOTH SEXES SHOULD BE SENT TO SCHOOL

1. The following reasons will establish that not the children of the rich or of the powerful only, but of all alike, boys and girls, both noble and ignoble, rich and poor, in all cities and towns, villages and hamlets, should be sent to school.

2. In the first place, all who have been born to man's estate have been born with the same end in view, namely, that they may be men, that is to say, rational creatures, the lords of other creatures, and the images of their Creator. All, therefore, must be brought on to a point at which, being properly imbued with wisdom, virtue, and piety, they may usefully employ the present life and be worthily prepared for that to come. God Himself has frequently asserted that with Him there is no respect of persons, so that, if, while we admit some to the culture of the intellect, we exclude others, we commit an injury not only against those who share the same nature as ourselves, but against God Himself, who wishes to be acknowledged, to be loved, and to be praised by all upon whom He has impressed His image. In this respect the fervour of all men will increase in proportion to the flame of knowledge that has been kindled. For our love is in direct ratio to our knowledge.

3. Now we do not know to what uses divine providence has destined this or that man; but this is certain, that out of the poorest, the most abject, and the most obscure, He

has produced instruments for His glory. Let us, therefore, imitate the sun in the heavens, which lights, warms, and vivifies the whole earth, so that whatever is able to live, to flourish, and to blossom, may do so.

4. Nor is it any obstacle that some seem to be naturally dull and stupid, for this renders more imperative the universal culture of such intellects. The slower and the weaker the disposition of any man, the more he needs assistance, that he may throw off his brutish dulness and stupidity as much as possible. Nor can any man be found whose intellect is so weak that it cannot be improved by culture. A sieve, if you continually pour water through it, grows cleaner and cleaner, although it cannot retain the liquid; and, in the same way, the dull and the weak-minded, though they may make no advance in letters, become softer in disposition and learn to obey the civil magistrates and the ministers of the Church. There have, besides, been many instances in which those who are naturally stupid have gained such a grasp of the sciences as to excel those who were more gifted. As the poet truly says: "Industry overcomes all obstacles." Again, just as some men are strong as children, but afterwards grow sick and ailing, while others, whose bodies are sickly and undersized in youth, develop into robust and tall men; so it is with intellects. Some develop early, but soon wear out and grow dull, while others, originally stupid, become sharp and penetrating. In our orchards we like to have not only trees that bring forth early fruit, but also those that are late-bearing; for each thing, as says the son of Sirach, finds praise in its season, and at length, though late, shows that it has not existed in vain. Why, therefore, should we wish that in the garden of letters only one class of intellects, the forward and active, should be tolerated? Let none be excluded unless God has denied him sense and intelligence.

5. Nor can any sufficient reason be given why the weaker sex (to give a word of advice on this point in particular) should be altogether excluded from the pursuit of knowledge (whether in Latin or in their mother-tongue).

They also are formed in the image of God, and share in His grace and in the kingdom of the world to come. They are endowed with equal sharpness of mind and capacity for knowledge (often with more than the opposite sex), and they are able to attain the highest positions, since they have often been called by God Himself to rule over nations, to give sound advice to kings and princes, to the study of medicine and of other things which benefit the human race, even to the office of prophesying and of inveighing against priests and bishops. Why, therefore, should we admit them to the alphabet, and afterwards drive them away from books? Do we fear their folly? The more we occupy their thoughts, so much the less will the folly that arises from emptiness of mind find a place.

6. But let not all books be given to them indiscriminately, as they have been given to the young of the other sex (and indeed it is greatly to be deplored that more caution has not been displayed in this matter); but only those from which, by the due observation of God and of His works, true virtue and true piety can be learned.

7. And let none cast in my teeth that saying of the Apostle: "I permit not a woman to teach" (1 Tim. ii. 12), or that of Juvenal in the sixth satire: "See that thy lawful wife be not a chatterbox, that she express not the simplest matter in involved language, nor be deeply versed in history," or the remark of Hippolytus in Euripides: "I detest a blue-stocking. May there never be a woman in my house who knows more than is fitting for a woman to know. For 'tis in the wise especially that Cypris engenders the desire for evil." These opinions, I opine, stand in no true opposition to our demand. For we are not advising that women be educated in such a way that their tendency to curiosity shall be developed, but so that their sincerity and contentedness may be increased, and this chiefly in those things which it becomes a woman to know and to do; that is to say, all that enables her to look after her household and to promote the welfare of her husband and her family.

8. If any ask, "What will be the result if artisans,

rustics, porters, and even women become lettered?" I answer, If this universal instruction of youth be brought about by the proper means, none of these will lack the material for thinking, choosing, following, and doing good things. All will know how the actions and endeavours of life should be regulated, within what limits we must progress, and how each man can protect his own position. Not only this, but all will regale themselves, even in the midst of their work and toil, by meditation on the words and works of God, and, by the constant reading of the Bible and other good books, will avoid that idleness which is so dangerous to flesh and blood. To sum up, they will learn to see, to praise, and to recognise God everywhere, and, in this way, to go through this life of care with enjoyment, and to look for the life to come with increased desire and hope. Does not such a condition of the Church represent to us the only paradise that it is possible to realise on this earth?