

CHAPTER X

THE INSTRUCTION GIVEN IN SCHOOLS SHOULD BE
UNIVERSAL

1. WE have already shown that every one ought to receive a universal education, and this at school. But do not, therefore, imagine that we demand from all men a knowledge (that is to say, an exact or deep knowledge) of all the arts and sciences. This would neither be useful of itself, nor, on account of the shortness of life, can it be attained by any man. For we see that each science is so vast and so complicated (as are physics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, or even agriculture and arboriculture) that it would occupy the lifetime of even the strongest intellects if they wished to master it thoroughly by investigation and experiment. Thus did Pythagoras devote himself to arithmetic, Archimedes to mechanics, Agricola to metallurgy,²¹ and Longolius²² (who spent his whole life in endeavouring to acquire a perfect Ciceronian style) to rhetoric. It is the principles, the causes, and the uses of all the most important things in existence that we wish all men to learn; all, that is to say, who are sent into the world to be actors as well as spectators. For we must take strong and vigorous measures that no man, in his journey through life, may encounter anything so unknown to him that he cannot pass sound judgment upon it and turn it to its proper use without serious error.

2. We must, therefore, concentrate our energies on

obtaining that, throughout our whole lives, in schools and by the aid of schools: (i.) our talents may be cultivated by study of the sciences and of the arts; (ii.) languages may be learned; (iii.) honest morals may be formed; (iv.) God may be sincerely worshipped.

3. He spoke wisely who said that schools were the workshops of humanity, since it is undoubtedly through their agency that man really becomes man, that is to say (to refer to our previous analysis): (i.) a rational creature; (ii.) a creature which is lord over all creatures and also over himself; (iii.) a creature which is the delight of his Creator. This will be the case if schools are able to produce men who are wise in mind, prudent in action, and pious in spirit.

4. These three principles, then, must be implanted in all the young in all schools, and this I shall prove, starting from the following fundamental points:—

(i.) From the circumstances by which we are surrounded;

(ii.) From ourselves;

(iii.) From Christ the God-man, the most perfect example of our perfection.

5. Things themselves, as far as they concern us, can be divided into three classes only: (i.) objects that we can observe, such as the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them; (ii.) objects that we can imitate, such as the marvellous order which pervades all things, and which man ought to imitate in his actions; (iii.) objects that we can enjoy, such as the grace of God and His manifold blessing here and for eternity. If man is to acquit himself creditably when brought into contact with this order of nature, he must be trained to know the things that are spread out for his observation in this marvellous amphitheatre, to do the things that it is right for him to do, and, finally, to enjoy those things of which the most benign Creator, treating him as a guest in His house, has, with liberal hand, given him the fruition.

6. If we consider ourselves, we see clearly that learning, virtue, and piety are of importance to all alike; whether we

look at the essential being of the soul, or at the object of our creation and introduction into the world.

7. The soul in its essential elements consists of three potentialities, which recall the uncreated Trinity, and these are the intellect, the will, and the memory. The province of the intellect is to observe the differences between things, even down to the smallest details. The will concerns itself with choice—that is to say, with the choice of things that are advantageous and the rejection of those which are not. The memory stores up for future use all the things with which the intellect and the will have been busied, and reminds the soul of its dependence on God and of its duty; in which aspect it is also called conscience.

In order, then, that these faculties may rightly fulfil their offices, it is necessary that they be furnished with such things as may illumine the intellect, direct the will, and stimulate the conscience, so that the intellect may be acute and penetrating, the will may choose without error, and the conscience may greedily refer all things to God. Therefore, just as these faculties (the intellect, the will, and the conscience) cannot be separated, since they constitute the same soul, so it is impossible to separate those three ornaments of the soul, erudition, virtue, and piety.

8. Now, if we consider why we have been sent into the world, it will be evident from two points of view that the object is threefold, namely, that we may serve God, His creatures, and ourselves, and that we may enjoy the pleasure to be derived from God, from His creatures, and from ourselves.

9. If we wish to serve God, our neighbours, and ourselves, it is necessary for us to possess, with respect to God, piety; with respect to our neighbours, virtue; and with respect to ourselves, knowledge. These principles, however, are intimately connected, and a man, for his own advantage, should be not only learned, but also virtuous and pious; for that of his neighbour, not only virtuous, but also learned and pious; and for the glory of God, not only pious, but also learned and virtuous.

10. If we consider the happiness to which God has destined mankind, we find that He showed His intention clearly when creating man, since He introduced him into a world furnished with all good things; prepared for him, in addition, a paradise of delights; and, finally, arranged to make him a partner of His eternal happiness.

11. Now, by the term "happiness" we understand not the pleasures of the body (though these, since they consist of the vigour of good health, and of the enjoyment of food and of sleep, can only arise from the virtue of temperance), but those of the soul, which arise either out of the objects around us, or from ourselves, or, finally, from God.

12. The pleasure which arises out of things themselves, is the pleasure that a wise man experiences in speculation. For, wherever he betakes himself, whatever he observes, and whatever he considers, he finds everywhere such attractions, that often, as it were, snatched out of himself, he merges his identity in them. It is to this that the book of Wisdom refers: "The conversation of wisdom hath no bitterness; and to live with her hath no sorrow, but mirth and joy" (viii. 16). And a heathen philosopher says: "There is nothing in life more pleasant than to seek out wisdom."

13. Pleasure in self is that very sweet delight which arises when a man, who is given over to virtue, rejoices in his own honest disposition, since he sees himself prompt to all things which the order of justice requires. This pleasure is far greater than the former one, according to the proverb "A good conscience is a perpetual feast."

14. Delight in God is the highest point to which pleasure can attain in this life, and is found when a man, feeling that God is eternally gracious to him, exults in His fatherly and immutable favour to such a degree that his heart melts with the love of God. He desires to know or to do nothing further, but, overwhelmed by God's mercy, he rests in peace and tastes the joys of eternal life. This is "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" (Phil. iv. 7), than which nothing more sublime can be desired or imagined.

These three principles, therefore, learning, virtue, and piety, are the three founts from which all the streams of the most perfect pleasures flow.

15. Lastly, God Himself, manifest in the flesh (that He might exhibit in Himself the perfection of all things), has taught by His example that these three elements must exist in each individual. For the Evangelist testifies that He advanced not only in stature, but also in wisdom and favour with God and man (Luke ii. 52). Here can be seen the blessed Trinity that adorns us. For what is wisdom but the knowledge of things as they are? What is it that brings us favour with men, if not amiability of character? What procures us the grace of God, if not the fear of the Lord, that is to say, inward, serious, and fervid piety? Let us, therefore, realise in ourselves that which we have seen in Jesus Christ, the absolute ideal of all perfection, the standard set up for us to imitate.

16. For this reason He said, "Learn of me" (Matt. xi. 29). And since this same Christ has been given to the human race as the most learned teacher, as the most holy priest, and as the most powerful king, it is evident that Christians should be formed on His model and should be enlightened through their intellects, sanctified through their consciences, and made powerful through their deeds (each in his own calling). Our schools, therefore, will then at length be Christian schools when they make us as like to Christ as is possible.

17. It is, therefore, an unhallowed separation if these three elements be not bound together as if by an adamant chain. How wretched is the teaching that does not lead to virtue and to piety! For what is literary skill without virtue? He who makes progress in knowledge but not in morality (says an old proverb), recedes rather than advances. And thus, what Solomon said of the beautiful but foolish woman, holds good of the learned man who possesses not virtue: "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion" (Prov. xi. 22). For, just as gems are set not in

lead but in gold, in which combination both are more beautiful, thus should knowledge be joined not to immorality but to virtue, when each will add adornment to the other. For the fear of the Lord, as it is the beginning and the end of wisdom, is also the coping-stone and crown of knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. i. and elsewhere).

18. Since, therefore, a man's whole life depends on the instruction that he has received during boyhood, every opportunity is lost unless the minds of all are then prepared for every emergency that may arise in life. Just as in his mother's womb each man receives his full complement of limbs,—hands, feet, tongue, etc.—although all men are not to be artificers, runners, scribes, or orators; so at school all men should be taught whatever concerns man, though in after life some things will be of more use to one man, others to another.