

CHAPTER XI

HITHERTO THERE HAVE BEEN NO PERFECT SCHOOLS

1. THIS confident heading may seem too presumptuous ; but I challenge the facts themselves, and, while I constitute the reader as judge, will myself do nothing but summon witnesses. I call a school that fulfils its function perfectly, one which is a true forging-place of men ; where the minds of those who learn are illuminated by the light of wisdom, so as to penetrate with ease all that is manifest and all that is secret (comp. Wisdom vii. 21), where the emotions and the desires are brought into harmony with virtue, and where the heart is filled with and permeated by divine love, so that all who are handed over to Christian schools to be imbued with true wisdom may be taught to live a heavenly life on earth ; in a word, where all men are taught all things thoroughly.

2. But has any school either existed on this plane of perfection or held this goal in view ; not to ask if any has ever reached it ? Lest I should seem to chase Platonic ideas and to dream of perfection such as exists nowhere and cannot be hoped for in this life, I will point out by another argument that such schools ought to be and have never yet existed.

3. Dr. Luther, in his exhortation to towns of the empire on behalf of the erection of schools (A.D. 1525), asks for these two things, among others. Firstly, that schools may be founded in all cities, towns, and villages, for the instruction of all the young of both sexes (the

necessity of which we proved in chap. ix.), so that even peasants and artisans may, for two hours daily, receive instruction in useful knowledge, in morality, and in religion. Secondly, that an easier method of instruction may be introduced, so that students, instead of developing an antipathy towards learning, may be enticed by irresistible attractions, and that, as he says, boys may gain no less pleasure from study than from spending whole days in playing ball and amusing themselves. These are the views of Dr. Luther.

4. This is indeed a noble counsel, and worthy of such a man ! But who does not see that matters have gone no farther than his wish ? For where are those universal schools, where is that attractive method ?

5. It is evident that nothing has been done, since in the smaller villages and hamlets no schools have been founded.

6. Where schools exist, they are not for the whole community, but only for the rich, since, owing to their cost, the poor cannot gain admission to them, except by some chance, such as pity on the part of some one. Among those excluded there are probably some excellent intellects, which are thus ruined and destroyed, to the great loss of the Church and of the state.

7. Further, the method used in instructing the young has generally been so severe that schools have been looked on as terrors for boys and shambles for their intellects, and the greater number of the students, having contracted a dislike for learning and for books, have hastened away to the workshops of artificers or to some other occupation.

8. On the other hand, those who remained at school (whether compelled to do so by parents and guardians, or influenced by the hope of obtaining some honourable position by means of their attainments, or drawn towards the liberal arts spontaneously and of their own nature) did not receive a serious or comprehensive education, but a preposterous and wretched one. For piety and virtue, which form the most important element in education, were

neglected more than anything else. In all the schools (and even in the universities, which ought to embody the greatest advances of human culture) these subjects held only a secondary place, so that for the most part, instead of tractable lambs, fiery wild asses and restive mules were produced; and instead of characters moulded to virtue, nothing issued from the schools but a spurious veneer of morality, a fastidious and exotic clothing of culture, and eyes, hands, and feet trained to worldly vanities. How few of these mannikins, who had for so long been polished by such a training in the languages and in the arts, realised that to the rest of the world they ought to be an example of temperance, charity, humility, humanity, gravity, patience, and continence!

The reason of this evidently is that the question of "virtuous living" is never raised in the schools. This is shown by the wretched discipline in nearly all schools, by the dissolute morals of all classes, and by the never-ceasing complaints, sighs, and tears of pious men. Can any one defend the condition in which our schools have been? An hereditary disease, sprung from our first parents, pervades all classes, so that, shut out from the tree of life, we direct our desires inordinately towards the tree of knowledge, and our schools also, permeated by this insatiable appetite, have hitherto pursued nothing but intellectual progress.

9. But with what method or with what success have they done even this? In truth, the only result achieved was the following. For five, ten, or more years they detained the mind over matters that could be mastered in one. What could have been gently instilled into the intellect, was violently impressed upon it, nay rather stuffed and flogged into it. What might have been placed before the mind plainly and lucidly, was treated of obscurely, perplexedly, and intricately, as if it were a complicated riddle.

10. In addition, though for the present we will pass this over, the intellect was scarcely ever nourished by the

actual facts, but was filled with the husks of words, with a windy and parrot-like loquacity, and with the chaff of opinions.

11. The study of the Latin language alone (to take this subject as an example), good heavens! how intricate, how complicated, and how prolix it was! Camp followers and military attendants, engaged in the kitchen and in other menial occupations, learn a tongue that differs from their own, sometimes two or three, quicker than the children in schools learn Latin only, though children have abundance of time, and devote all their energies to it. And with what unequal progress! The former gabble their languages after a few months, while the latter, after fifteen or twenty years, can only put a few sentences into Latin with the aid of grammars and of dictionaries, and cannot do even this without mistakes and hesitation. Such a disgraceful waste of time and of labour must assuredly arise from a faulty method.

12. On this subject the celebrated Eilhard Lubinus, professor in the University of Rostock, has with justice remarked: "When I consider the ordinary method of teaching boys in schools, it seems to me as if it had been laboriously devised with a view to make it impossible for teachers and pupils alike to lead or to be led to a knowledge of the Latin tongue, without great labour, great tedium, infinite trouble, and the greatest possible consumption of time. A state of things which I cannot think of without shuddering." And a little farther on: "After frequent consideration of these matters I find myself always led to the conclusion, that the entire system must have been introduced into schools by some evil and envious genius, the enemy of the human race." So says Lubinus, who is only one out of many authorities whom I could quote in my favour.

13. But what need is there of witnesses? How many of us there are who have left the schools and universities with scarcely a notion of true learning! I, unfortunate man that I am, am one of many thousands who have

miserably lost the sweetest spring-time of their whole life, and have wasted the fresh years of youth on scholastic trifles. Ah. how often, since my mind has been enlightened, has the thought of my wasted youth wrung sighs from my breast, drawn tears from my eyes, and filled my heart with sorrow! How often has my grief caused me to exclaim :

Oh that Jupiter could bring back to me the years that are past
and gone!

14. But these prayers are in vain. Bygone days will never return. None of us who is advanced in years can grow young again, commence his career anew, and, furnished with a better method, pursue it more successfully. Of this there is no question. One thing alone does remain, and that is to give those who come after us such advice as we can. By showing how it was that our masters led us into error we shall be able to point out the way in which such errors may be avoided.