

A Roman Catholic Bishop on the Means and Ends of Education.*

WE have called attention to Bishop Spalding's two previous essays, "Education and the Higher Life" and "Things of the Mind," as having permanent value. The present essay has perhaps yet greater importance, especially in discussing the ends of education. The entire series is a plea for the recognition of the moral, and in some respects the distinctly religious elements in education. This point is made with the eye always on the non-denominational or secular character of the public schools in this country, and with a frank acceptance of that position, which is most creditable to a Roman Catholic prelate. Bishop Spalding says (p. 141):

"I am willing to assume and to accept as a fact that our theological differences make it impossible to introduce the teaching of any religious creed into the public schools. I take the system as it is—that is, as a system of secular education—and I address myself more directly to the question proposed: What is, or should be, its scope?

"The fact that religion is excluded makes it all the more necessary that humanizing and ethical aims should be kept constantly in view. . . . Not for a moment should we permit ourselves to be deluded by the thought that because the teaching of religious creeds is excluded, therefore we make no appeal to the fountain-heads which sleep within every breast, the welling of whose waters alone has power to make us human."

So long as this position can be maintained there is no force and no terror in the assertion that the secular school must of necessity be godless, and train children without conscience and without religion. The educational means and methods on which Bishop Spalding dwells, particularly in this essay, are distinctly moral, and deserve attention as such. We venture, however, to think that the more important part of the essay is that which directs attention to the moral end of all education and to the training of character as the chief work of the schools. This should command attention on the double ground of absolute truthfulness and practical importance. Bishop Spalding would seem to agree with us that, in view of the present situation of public affairs, it is not a time to be quarreling over what creeds may be taught in the public schools, but to place ourselves on the highest ground of common morality. To quote again:

"We must cease to tell boys and girls that education will enable them to get hold of the good things of which they believe the world to be full; we must make them realize rather that the best thing in the world is a noble man or woman, and to be that is the only certain way to a worthy and contented life."

True, every word of it, and truest of all when read in the deep thunder of the following paragraph:

"It is plain that our besetting sin, as a people, is not intemperance or unchastity but dishonesty. From the watering and manipulating of stocks to the adulteration of food and drink, from the booming of towns and lands to the selling of votes and the buying of office, from the halls of Congress to the policeman's beat, from the capitalist who controls trusts and syndicates to the mechanic who does inferior work, the taint of dishonesty is everywhere. We distrust one another, distrust those who manage our public affairs, distrust our own fixed will to suffer the worst that may befall rather than cheat or steal or lie. Dishonesty hangs, like a mephitic air, about our newspapers, our legislative assemblies, the municipal government of our towns and cities, about our churches even, since our religion itself seems to lack that highest kind of honesty, the downright and thorough sincerity which is its life-breath."