

CORRESPONDENCE.

A NATIONAL QUESTION.

(The Editor is not responsible for the opinions expressed in this column).

(To the Editor).

Madame,

The time is drawing near when the Dominion will once more be involved in the turmoil of a general election. The life-work of the late Prime Minister will stand for all time as an example of how a Christian training moulds character, and shapes destiny. We have it on the authority of the Minister of Education that Mr Massey earnestly desired to see the Bible in schools, and in what more fitting manner could we perpetuate his memory than by supporting at the polls only those candidates who pledge themselves, as the mouthpieces of Christian people, to do their utmost to bring about this much-needed reform in our educational laws.

Social evils will continue to exercise their baneful and potent influence on the community at large so long as we employ materialistic means to combat and eradicate them. We are prone to treat effects instead of causes, to lop off the branches instead of striking at the roots, and in consequence the results of our efforts are negligible. These perplexing and ever-increasing problems confronting New Zealand at the present day are the inevitable harvest of the seeds of secularism sown in discord and inharmony for nearly half a century. In 1877 the Bible was banished by legislation from our State Schools, and the pernicious secular system instituted. Predestined to failure from its inception by reason of its materialistic nature, the national system of education is responsible in no small degree for the deplorable traits manifest in the school children of the day, the innocent victims of a sinister heritage from parents and grandparents educated in the worldly atmosphere engendered by the man-made law: "and the teaching shall be entirely of a secular character." We cannot retrieve the past, it is irrevocable; but we should make it a stepping-stone to better things. Let us begin from the bottom and build wisely and well for the sake of future generations. There are those who would relegate

to Church and Sunday School the inculcation of Christian principles, but brief reflection should convince a thinker that the benefits accruing from an hour's instruction on the Sabbath, are totally inadequate as a remedial agency for the absence of Biblical teaching during the twenty-five hours comprising the ordinary school week. The State Schools of to-day are the training grounds for the citizens of to-morrow, and to ensure that our boys and girls will be efficiently equipped to enable them to eventually carry out the important functions pertaining to good citizenship, the voice of the people should be raised in protest against the retention of an educational code that is sapping the moral life-blood of these young citizens in the making. Education entirely divorced from religion is wrong in principle, and disastrous in its ultimate effects. Spiritual knowledge is infinitely more beneficial than mere material wisdom. The essence and soul of all things is spiritual; take away the spirit and there is no vitality, no life. Our existing educational policy aims primarily at the development of the mental and physical faculties, but leaves the child groping in Pagan ignorance of the fundamental truths that are absolutely essential to the formation of character. In thousands of cases the primary school presents the only opportunity for hearing the Divine message of the Scriptures, but this is denied the child by a tyrannical law that excludes the Word of God from state schools. So long as the Bible remains to school children a sealed book, and reference to its pages is forbidden the teacher, all efforts to instil patriotism, honour, and kindred virtues in the juvenile minds are rendered impotent and unavailing, modern methods of instruction notwithstanding. The temporary suspension, by the educational authorities, of the secular code on Anzac Day and other occasions, when religious ceremonies are held in the public schools, serves to emphasize the fact that when put to the crucial test, our "free, compulsory, and secular" system of education pales into insignificance beside the inspiring and impressive grandeur of Christ's teachings, for "The Truth is mighty and will prevail." It is high time that petty sectarian strife and narrow

prejudice, that have been instrumental in keeping the Bible out of our schools, should be swept aside and an earnest and united effort made to have the law amended to allow Biblical instruction to be given daily by teachers, in accordance with a syllabus to be drawn up by the Education Department and revised every two or three years, as is done in England. This method would preclude denominational teaching, and parental privileges would be safeguarded by a conscience clause exempting children from attendance when desired. Official reports from abroad indicate that there is little or no sectarian feeling or friction with religious sects in connection with Bible-reading in schools. When setting up schools in Rhodesia Cecil Rhodes insisted that half-an-hour each day should be devoted to religious teaching. Matthew Arnold, the most experienced school Inspector England had had for many a day, said that morality could not be taught except on the basis of the Scriptures. Letters from State School teachers in Australia, in which country four States include Bible-reading in the school curriculum, furnish convincing evidence of the benefits accruing to both teachers and scholars, and of the harmonious working of the system. A recent referendum taken indicates that the advent of the Bible in the public schools of New Zealand would be welcomed by hundreds of teachers as heralding the dawn of a new era, when Christianity would be the predominant note of education. Then, and not till then, may we pave the way by righteous methods to the attainment of those ideals which make for the highest and best in our home and national life.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation."

I am,

Yours truly,

A STATE SCHOOL TEACHER.

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