

IT HAS ITS GOOD POINTS.

Many critical eyes are in these days turned on the education system of New Zealand; and much denunciatory ink has been expended on its shortcomings. Many of these criticisms have been justified, many have been exaggerated, and not a few have been unfair. In our youthful days we were often exhorted to "count our blessings," and the counsel is one that may well be heeded at this time and in this connection. Statements have been made over names that should command respect that would almost lead those who do not know the facts to suppose that to send a child to school would be to condemn him to physical ill-health and mental stagnation. This kind of talk, though it serves a certain useful purpose, is often one-sided and unfair. It is true that not all the children of New Zealand comply with the prescription of the poet's fancy "Iron-jointed, supple-sinew'd, they shall dive and they shall run," but a great many of them do so, and more will do so when the work of properly co-ordinated Education and Health Departments has had time to show its results. When the people of New Zealand convince the Government that they are in earnest about the welfare of the children and of the State, the Government will begin to "sit up and take notice," but let us not, in our eagerness for a better future, be unjust to the present or forgetful of the past.

New Zealand has much to be thankful for in its education system. When it was designed it was probably the best that up to that time the world had known. Since then other nations have made far greater progress than we have, so that we have lost our position of pre-eminence; but that is not to say our system is a failure. It is very far from that. Though it has relatively fallen out of the front rank; it has actually made very considerable progress, and has achieved great success. Particularly is this the case in regard to the unifying and consolidating the spirit of the people of the Dominion. With few exceptions, the whole of the Dominion's youth has passed through the Dominion's schools. All classes have met in the same class-rooms, joined in the same games, shared in the same lessons, and competed for the same prizes. When school days have ended, they have, speaking generally, engaged in the same employments and

recreations, and have thus, from youth to maturity, grown up together in "unity of spirit and the bond of peace," and, let it be added, in a very large measure of "righteousness of life" also. Hence the happy freedom our country has known from the class distinctions and sectarian dissensions that have marred the lives of multitudes in the older countries. This freedom has been the result of the fusion of classes, the softening of animosities, and the growth of mutual understanding and good-will so abundantly manifest in the manner of New Zealand's response to the call of war.

The national unity that has been founded in the schools has stood the challenge of fate, and has been proved true both by our men in the field and by our women at home. There is the same co-operation among the patriotic women-workers at home as there is among the fighting forces in the field. As in the school the scholarship winners, so in the field the leaders of men, have come from all sorts and conditions of homes,—they are alike the product of the national system of education. Truly, we have much to be thankful for, and much more to be hopeful for. What has been done is only a beginning. We have to convince a stick-in-the-mud Government that we must not stand on our achievements,—we must go forward. Our national spirit has on the whole stood the tests of the past with honour. Will it equally well stand the severer tests of the future? Not without cultivation, not without direction, not without instruction in the eternal principles of justice, mercy, and truth, which, when all is said, is what is meant by the word education.

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