

The School-Book Question---Justice Demanded---A Word to our M. P. P.'s.

To the Editor of the Miscellany:

SIR: The people of New Brunswick are under a debt of gratitude to you for ventilating the grievance regarding the printing of the books now in use in our public schools by outside publishers. The injustice of such an arrangement, not only to our printers, bookbinders, etc., but to the general public, is now apparent to all. This is a highly important matter—one affecting every man, woman and child in the land,—and the wonder is that it has been lost sight of so long. Since it has been shown, however, as you have already done, that the books can be printed in our own province 25 to 30 per cent. cheaper than outside of it, it seems to me, unless people are altogether blind to their own interests, that it is time they took up this question in earnest. The injustice lies not, perhaps, so much in the fact of the Board of Education having, some years ago, made such an arrangement as that to which you refer with T. Nelson & Sons and a Halifax publishing firm, but in their continuing it now, when it is well known they are inflicting loss on the province, and when the time seems to have arrived that another and more favorable arrangement could be made. There is no doubt that the Board, on the inauguration of the present School Law, encountered grave difficulties in getting a series of books adapted to the requirements of our schools, and probably made the best bargain possible under the circumstances. At that time it would have been a labor of some years to compile such books in New Brunswick; and, indeed, it is questionable whether it could have been done at all: at least, it is not likely they could have been produced cheaper. Times were good then, and wages and the cost of production much higher than of late years. Now, however, circumstances are changed, prices rule lower, wages in all departments have been reduced, retrenchment and economy seem to be the watchwords all round, and as these books can be printed here at greatly reduced rates, I see no reason why it should not be done at once, thus affording employment to a number of our own workmen, and bringing down the prices to correspond with the times.

A few questions will naturally be suggested to those whose attention may be drawn to this matter. First it may be asked, what are the

terms of the contract between our Board of Education and the foreign publishers? How long does it continue? Have the Board the power of terminating this contract at pleasure, or, are they bound hand and foot to these publishers and at their mercy, as some are inclined to think? Have they retained the copyright of such of the books as were got up specially for our schools under their own sanction and authority? Can you, Mr. Editor, or any one else, give us some information on these points? Unless I am greatly mistaken, the Board of Education, or which is the same thing, the Local Government, have been singularly reticent regarding this publishing job. Why have the great body of the supporters of our Free School system, whose money is sent out of the country in thousands of dollars annually for these books, been kept in the dark and treated in this way? Surely it cannot be that they are so very indifferent about a matter vitally affecting their own interests? If a contract exists from which the Government cannot withdraw for a number of years, let the public be informed of it without delay. We want no underhand arrangement, but everything open and above board. If the Government have the power of annulling the contract at any time, the sooner it is done the better, and the work given to our own printers, or at least an opportunity given them to compete with the outside publishers. The expense of our school books under the present arrangement, during these hard times, is a burdensome one.

In some of the States, I believe, it is the custom for their Boards of Education, when a series of school books is required, to receive tenders from publishers for the supply of books, previous to entering into a contract with them,—samples of such books having been first examined and reported on by the County and State Institutes. When a series is adopted, a certain price is agreed on, at which they are invariably to be sold by the booksellers. Competition in this way keeps down the price, while at the same time publishers, in view of having all the schools of a State for a market during a term of years, generally make a profitable contract. Was any such arrangement as this made by our Board?

Let our taxpayers require their representatives in the Assembly at the present session to investigate this matter, and see if a more equitable bargain cannot be made, both for our printers and for the public. It would seem as if we had