

German - Amshulians

SEPTEMBER 7, 1914.

CORRESPONDENCE.

GERMAN-AUSTRALIANS!

To the Editor.

Sir—I have read with the greatest of interest the letters appearing under this heading. Mr. Calder's pleased me most. Speaking from personal experience I can only say that the treatment which I received at the hands of fellow-citizens, since the outbreak of war, has been kindness itself. People visited me at my house whom I had never had before the pleasure of welcoming under my roof. Nodding acquaintances have come up to me in the street and shaken hands with me. People with whom I have not been on speaking terms for years were magnanimous enough to sink old differences and come and spoke to me again. I felt it deeply. Sir Richard Butler, in true knightly fashion, stood up for the German-Australians on public platforms, and pointed out fearlessly the right way to act towards us during the crisis. My own experience has been that of many of my compatriots. The spirit of the Australians is perfect and most praiseworthy—better than I ever expected or experienced. And we stand in need of sympathy. Only a cur can forget his birthplace and the cradle of his youth. Britishers will appreciate this sentiment more than any other nations; but love for his old home is one thing, and an oath of allegiance is another. The man who in the hour of danger denies his native country, the home of his parents, is the very man whom an oath would not bind, if personal advantages can be gained by the breaking of it. We German-Australians, with very rare exceptions, do not belong to that gentry. We came out here to better our positions—not so much from a financial point of view, as from the point of freedom. The trammels and social grooves had become irksome to us. We wanted free air to breathe, and more elbow room. Australia, above all other countries, offered us our opportunity. We had complete faith in the British sanctuary offered to all nations, so long as they submitted cheerfully to the laws and usages of their adopted country. Nobody can ever say that the German-Australians have not made excellent settlers. By their industry, thoroughness, and economy they have always set a good example to every one. They have been made to feel at home, and inter-married. Now this awful crisis has come to test the relationship. The Australians have stood the test well. I am sure the German-Australians appreciate it very much, and will more than ever adhere to the solemn obligations of their oath of allegiance. They would be the first to condemn any action which would

point to any act of treachery. If there were a call to arms against any enemy but Germany you would find every one respond heartily in the defence of Australia. I would offer my services as one of the first; but before I would take up arms against the country of my birth I would rather put a bullet through my head, and so would many more. I would offer my services in an ambulance corps, but otherwise I would have to remain neutral in the strictest sense of the word. Just consider our position for one moment. I give my own case as an example of many similar. My wife is an Australian. My children and grandchildren are Australians. I have been 30 years here. I have spent the greater and most valuable part of my life in Australia. I dearly love it, and would not live in any other land. I have close relations in Germany; 18 sons of cousins are under arms now. I have an uncle in Russia. Two of his sons are under arms against their cousins. Six of my relations are serving under French colours, and five are in the English Army. Here is a whole family, and not the only one, fighting against each other. If their wishes had been consulted, and if they had had a voice in the matter, they would be the best of friends, and would not be at war with each other—by compulsion. Now you can fancy and see what a dreadful nightmare this war is to all of us German-Australians. Victory of the one or the other nation does not give any pleasurable elation. Our hearts are torn asunder. We did not start the war.

We had no hand in it. Our protestations are powerless, and we could not stop it. We have to look on, helpless, sorrowful, and agitated by emotions, to which Tantalus's tortures are nothing. And, to fill our cup of sorrow to the brim, we have to see our young Australian kinsmen, whom the country can so ill afford to let go, depart from their homes and from those so near and dear to them, to be sacrificed on the altars of Mars. God help them, and those to whom they belong! I had a promising son, 19 years of age, a cadet in the Naval Force, on whose behalf Admiral Patey handed to me, in front of his comrades, a medal of the Empire Shield for being third best shot in the Naval Cadets' Force of the whole of the Empire. This was 12 months ago, after his death. To-day I am reconciled to my loss. He and myself have been saved great mental and bodily suffering. I would not have stood in the way of his duty towards his country. I would be the first to encourage patriotism in the young Australians. It is a most ennobling sentiment. Sacrifices are the great factors to make one love the home which bred and reared us. The greater the sacrifice, the dearer it becomes. This war, dreadful though it is, will be the real birth of the Australian nation. It will make people shoulder their responsibilities, and by so doing put the real grit into them. The pity of it is that it will cost so many valuable and young lives, which are so badly needed here. I wish to God that it were all over, and peace—everlasting peace—established once more for good and all.

I am, Sir, &c., E. ELKAN.