

NON-SECTARIAN SCHOOLS.

LETTER FROM EX-SPEAKER BLAINE.

[The following letter was written by Mr. Blaine to a prominent Ohio gentleman just after the late election in that State. It is printed now with at least the implied consent of the writer:]

AUGUSTA, Me., Oct. 20.

MY DEAR SIR: The public school agitation in your late campaign is liable to break out elsewhere, and, occurring first in one State and then in another, may keep the whole country in a ferment for years to come. This inevitably arouses sectarian feeling, and leads to that bitterest and most deplorable of all strifes—the strife between religious denominations. It seems to me that this question ought to be settled in some definite and comprehensive way—and the only settlement that can be final is the complete victory for non-sectarian schools. I am sure this will be demanded by the American people at all hazards and at any cost.

The dread of sectarian legislation in this country has been felt many times in the past. It began very early. The first amendment of the Constitution, the joint product of Jefferson and Madison, proposed in 1789, declared that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the exercise thereof." At that time, when the powers of the Federal Government were untried and undeveloped, the fear was that Congress might be the source of danger to perfect religious liberty, and hence all power was taken from it. At the same time the States were left free to do as they pleased in regard to "an establishment of religion," for the tenth amendment, proposed by that eminent jurist Theophilus Parsons, and adopted contemporaneously with the first, declared that "all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

A majority of the people in any State in this Union can therefore, if they desire it, have an established church—under which the minority may be taxed for the erection of church edifices which they never enter and for the support of creeds which they do not believe. This power was actually exercised in some of the States long after the adoption of the Federal Constitution, and although there may be no positive danger of its revival in the future, the possibility of it should not be permitted. The auspicious time to guard against an evil is when all will unite in preventing it.

And in curing this constitutional defect, all possibility of hurtful agitation on the school question should be ended also. Just let the old Jefferson-Madison amendment be applied to the States by adding the following to the inhibitory clauses in Section 10, Article I. of the Federal Constitution, viz.:

"No State shall make any law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; and no money raised by taxation in any State for the support of public schools or derived from any public fund therefor shall ever be under the control of any religious sect; nor shall any money so raised ever be divided between religious sects or denominations."

This, you will observe, does not interfere with any State having just such a school system as its citizens may prefer—subject to the single and simple restriction that the schools shall not be made the arena for sectarian controversy or theological disputation. This adjustment, it seems to me, would be comprehensive and conclusive—and would be fair alike to Protestant and Catholic, to Jew and Gentile—leaving the religious faith and the conscience of every man free and unmolested.

Very sincerely yours,
J. G. BLAINE.