OUR NATIONAL IDEALS.

It is already apparent that the negotiations for peace will degenerate into a scramble after trade advantages, and it is unfortunate that the people of all the belligerent countries really believe in the worth of such advantages. Nothing could be more important at the present time than to demonstrate how valuable they are. We can put aside for the moment the irony and the multitude of making pecuniary profit out of a struggle that has cost millions of lives and shattered myriad things of beauty. The problem to be considered is whether such pecuniary profit has anything to do with the general enrichment of the State, of our own State in particular.

Australia's voice in the matter, the voice of the youngest and most idealistic country in the world, has hitherto been very definite. According to our Prime Minister we can, by an odd mixture of trickery and discipline, cripple Germany's trade and destroy her influence. The most damaging criticism of Germany, from a universal point of view, is that she has used a widely-diffused education and science, a patient industry, and an indisputable energy, for no better purpose than to distribute over the world a flood of goods, in a better manner than her neighbours can. But, we, apparently, can combat her education and science with trickery and discipline, and thus reap some of the profits that once were hers. Or at any rate, we can prevent her expansion by importing our wooden toys and cheap crockery only from the Allied countries, such as Russia or Japan.

The importance and danger of all these adjustments is that they blind the eyes of the public as to what really conduces to the enrichment of the State. Continual veneration of the platform and in the press has an effect that is extraordinary and appalling. Three years ago everyone would have scoffed at the suggestion that the crippling of Germany's trade was worth the lives of twenty thousand farmers are not too great a price to pay for such an advantage. We have to get back to ideals before we can touch reality. We have to consider wherein the real wealth of the State lies, before we can gauge how it can be enriched or advantaged.

Our own position in Australia is comparatively simple. We are building a nation, and our industrial interests are too young to compete with those of older countries in the markets of the world. Even abroad, they are too young to compete with them by producing better articles. To us, the ultimate hope is to build a society where the creative energies of the people will have full play. The craftsman's bench, the scientist's laboratory, are in the artist's studio. While we are out of the struggle for world trade, this idea is comparatively easy of attainment. Flinging us into that struggle, and we are lost.

For it is not often said that to-day world trade mainly means the manufacture and distribution of worthless articles for profit. The nation that joins in this sordid business is subtly destroyed from the beginning; no matter how rich it makes a few men. I hope to enlarge on this statement in another article, but meantime it is necessary to repeat that the matter of trade advantages is of no interest to us, and that if we are to insist on the ends.

VANCE PALMER.