

CONTEMPORARY LIFE AND THOUGHT IN BELGIUM.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CLERICAL PARTY AND ITS CAUSES.

BELGIAN life and thought is at the present moment summed up in the political question. The triumph of the Clerical party at the elections of June 10, 1884, has far surpassed its most sanguine expectations. As I have recently proved elsewhere, the reaction of public opinion is not so thorough as the number of returned Clerical deputies would lead one to suppose. Their overwhelming success is owing to the vices of our elective system, the *scrutin de liste* without the representation of minorities. 34,080 Clerical votes have returned 67 deputies, whereas 22,117 Liberal votes have only two. Consequent upon this is a complete inversion of the majority. The Liberals, who before numbered 79 in the House against 59 Clericals, have now only 52 representatives against 86. Amongst the causes which have led to the triumph of the Clerical party, some are of a transitory character, others more durable. The transitory causes are, first, the new taxes; second, the proposition to create a reserve force of 30,000 men; third, the agrarian and industrial crisis, engendering great discontent with the government; fourth, an excellent but expensive school-law, which was forcibly imposed upon the *Communes*. The lasting causes are the difficulties of the social and religious questions, which are of general importance and arouse widespread interest.

Heretofore, all those who wished to keep in check the Clerical authority, forgetting their differences of opinion, were united to defend the independence of the civil power, and thus formed the great Liberal party. But recently, a third party has sprung up, which heedless of the threatening dominion of the clergy, aspires to make it the special mission of the Liberal party to accomplish social reforms by a call to universal suffrage. Then, in the public meetings at Brussels, this party attacked with great violence the moderate Liberals, called by them *doctrinaires*, discouraging some, frightening others, and thus estranged those vacillating and timid electors, instinctively Conservative, who are very numerous in all countries.

The Radicals or *Intransigeants* called themselves *Progressists*; but those whom they called *Doctrinaires* also desire progress, which is the concluding refrain of all their discourses. That is true, say the *Progressists*, but we wish for a more marked and advancing progress. Then we may ask them: Whither do you wish to lead us? and to what end? As Lord Salisbury lately said, in his remarkable article in the *Quarterly Review*, on "Disintegration," the *Progressist* must not be like the Wandering Jew, doomed to endless walking. Art

for art, or aimless talk, has still less scope in politics than in literature. If the *Progressists* want to advance, and that rapidly; what will they come to? If they claim universal suffrage it is in order to improve the condition of the lower classes. In requiring political equality, they have in view economic equality, and this leads to so-called Socialism. They do not seek to conceal it, and I make no objection thereunto. I belong myself to this ethico-historical economical school, which has been called the Socialists of the Chair, and for my part, like our ancestors the "Gueux," I accept the epithet with which our adversaries have stigmatized my colleagues of German universities, invoking morals, justice and history to raise our science above the deification of egotism, with the object of ameliorating the prospects of the working-class.

In a book lately published, "Contemporary Socialism," I endeavoured to extract the portions of truth contained in Socialistic doctrines, and I do not hesitate to say that these are considerable. The force of the conclusive arguments which lead to State-Socialism has by degrees impressed itself on the minds of great thinkers, such as Stuart Mill, Fichte, Schäffle, Minghetti; of Ministers, as Bismarck, Gladstone and Lord Salisbury; of Sovereigns, as the Kings of Italy and Denmark. The latter is just now occupied with the Socialistic schemes lately rejected by the German Parliament. As the oak springs from an acorn, so may Socialism be traced to Christianity. In every Christian there is the germ of Socialism, and every Socialist is unwittingly a Christian.

As Tocqueville, in speaking of democracy, remarks, the advance towards equality has continued without interruption in history. But if, instead of making Socialism a doctrine of Christian fraternity, impelling the rich to elevate the poor through schools, superannuation funds, saving-banks for young and old, shortening the hours of labour, and successive reforms, the Intransigents injure their own cause by a programme of popular agitation demanding universal suffrage, they will receive, in Belgium at least, many checks, and will provoke reaction. The reason is very evident. The social question is not ripe; it is looked at differently by different people. Thinkers have not solved it, and if they had, the people are not ready for its application.

All serious modification of the present social organization takes it for granted that the implements of labour are the rightful property of the labourer. But as industry exerts itself to-day collectively in large manufactures and by means of large capital, it is necessary that the workers should be ready to push forward large industrial associations, or, in other words, to manage production by *co-operative* societies. At present, it must be admitted, success of this kind is quite exceptional. Allow full scope to the ablest Socialist living, with every conceivable facility to modify as he pleases the existing organization, and to suppress by the quickest means doctrinaires, reactionists, and proprietors, he will fail to establish and to put in motion a new social organization with all its varied requirements. A political revolution may be got up in a day, and republicanism substituted for monarchy, or despotism for liberty; but a great change in the civil and economical state of affairs is only attainable by slow

evolution. German Socialists, such as Rodbertus, Marx and Lassalle, not misled by enthusiasm, foresaw the realization of their ideal in a very distant future. Rodbertus looked forward to five centuries, and Lassalle to one or two. It is in this period of preparation that, on the one hand, the wealthy classes will be penetrated by Christian social feelings and by the principle of human solidarity; and that, on the other hand, the people will develop political and industrial capacities. It is the *bourgeoisie* that is now accomplishing this preparatory work. By their untimely programme, the Progressists retard it; because by frightening the wealthy classes they incite reaction and thus impede the progress of equality.

In Belgium especially a call to universal suffrage would prove an irreparable mistake. No doubt every one being interested in the government, it is very desirable that all should vote. But in order that the vote may be of use to the public interest and to those to whom it is accorded, it is necessary that the elector should be well qualified to discern his own interest, and that he should not allow himself, through his vote, to fall a prey to a master or to the Roman clergy. But we see that an extended suffrage gives unlimited power to the Church of Rome in all those countries where the Catholic faith is dominant. Do not let us be deceived by any signs of the influence of the French freethinkers: this is restricted to small numbers in great towns. Belgium is thoroughly Catholic, and even Ultramontane. Allow me to make a few statements with regard to the different European countries I have visited. In those where, on Sundays, men go but seldom to Mass, the clergy has lost influence in politics; take, for instance, France, Portugal, and a great part of Italy. Where on the contrary, the people religiously perform their duties, the power of the priest is great, because he has in his hands that almost irresistible power—the refusal of the sacraments. In Belgium, before the priests had recourse to violence to fill their schools, nearly every one went to Mass on Sundays, in the small and large towns, as well as in the country. Even those who were lukewarm, with very few exceptions, sought the services of the priests on the important occasions of life—birth, marriage, and death. Give universal suffrage to these believing populations, and if the clergy make use of the confessional and the communion, they will be obeyed. Even in France, so free from the Roman yoke in comparison with Belgium, the power of the clergy is so great that M. Paul Bert dare not advise the adoption of a measure, so simple and so just as the separation of the Church from the State, though recommended by well-regulated minds such as those of Laboulaye, Pressensé, Vinet, &c. The following is an extract from a remarkable report made by M. Paul Bert on the Concordat: "This measure (separation of Church and State) may be adopted in Protestant countries where men, forming their own belief, can more easily unite religious exigencies and civic duties. But in countries where the Catholic religion has an important minority, and still more where she has a great majority, this solution would be very dangerous, because the religious influence takes an almost Divine authority and can silence all scruples of the citizens. In France, particularly, it is not yet ripe. . . . The factitious authority which the Church has acquired in this country must first be abolished."

Gambetta, without having elevated views, had a keen sense of realities, which was his strong characteristic. He said to me, speaking of Belgium: "Do not adopt universal suffrage in your country, it will put you under the yoke of the clergy." Our history proves how much greater is the influence of the Roman Church in Belgium than in France. The Spanish Terror of the sixteenth century has achieved its object better than the Terror of '93. It is enough to cite the Revolution of 1788 against Joseph II., the Revolution of 1830 against William I., and especially the resistance to our last school-law. The statistics of our actual Prime Minister, M. Malou, may be exaggerated; but it is none the less true that within eighteen months the bishops have been able to open schools in all the Communes, and have entered more pupils than there are in the Communal schools. A recent inquiry, made by our Parliament, has revealed by what objectionable means the priests have attained this success. But, nevertheless, there is the indisputable fact which should make us understand what would be the results of universal suffrage. The schools of the clergy were all full, while a great number of public schools were empty. In no country, excepting perhaps Tyrol, could a similar result be attained. In response to the appeal of the *Univers*, it was attempted in France, but was a miserable failure. How very limited is the power of the Liberal party when compared with that of the Church! Some imagine Catholicism to be declining. So it may be; but the intensity of life is measured by productive energy and creative power; and never, at any other period, not even in the Middle Ages, has the Catholic Church established so many different institutions,—convents, brotherhoods, associations, schools, hospitals, refuges, journals, &c. In England and the United States Protestantism presents a similar scene, because there faith reigns,—that great power which the Progressists ignore. It is very extraordinary that Liberalism has not yet been submerged under the surging tide of Catholic works. It owed till now its safety to two causes—first, the general progress of thought, which, until now, has been in its favour; secondly, the unity of the Liberal party. This unity ceasing; the triumph of the Clerical party became inevitable, and I am afraid it will be of long standing. Abandoned by its ancient chiefs, the *bourgeois doctrinaires*—as it was formerly abandoned by the nobles, partisans of Voltaire, Joseph II., and the House of Orange—not being able, as in France, to trust to the masses, which here obey the clergy, having only for adherents a most variable section of the middle class, and a still smaller proportion of industrial working men of socialistic principles, the Liberals would, under universal suffrage, cease to form a constitutional party; they would be only a factious minority.

There are those in Belgium who think that for decided friends of progress it is better to be in the minority than to have in front a standstill majority, who only hinder all truly democratic improvements. The need of obtaining the support of the people, they say, will oblige the Liberals to adopt a democratic platform; hence when the Liberal party is again at the head of affairs, its reforms will be more thorough and more favourable to the lower classes. The subject is worthy of a calm and careful investigation. On the Continent, and principally in the Catholic countries, I am afraid we are on the eve of a general move-

ment, not of progress, but of retrogression. The present generation is overwhelmed by a strange feeling of sadness, anxiety, and deception. What was the crowning point of our ambitions twenty or thirty years ago? Constitutional *régime*, parliamentary government, necessary liberties, and the Republic for the most ardent. We have obtained all this and more besides. Is the end achieved? Does peace reign amongst nations? Does harmony exist between classes? Are the people satisfied? Nearly everywhere parliamentary rule leads to confusion and helplessness, owing to the instability of the Ministry. What means liberty for the mass who continue to live in ignorance and poverty? Has the Republic, called by M. Guizot the most noble form of government, bestowed all the promised benefits, and responded to the hopes of its partisans? In any case "progress" brings before us two formidable questions which we are unable at present to solve, and which drag us consequently into great difficulty—the social question, and the religious question. Liberals of Catholic countries, in order to free the population from the power of the clergy, must take from them the superintendence of education and establish State schools. Amongst certain Protestant nations, as in the United States, this is accepted by the whole nation. But in Catholic countries, particularly in France and in Belgium, the clergy condemn and attack the communal school and national education. The struggle against the Church has found its way into the remotest villages and into all consciences. As faith is the principal weapon of the priests, it is against faith that war is declared. This cannot be doubted. In France they have gone so far as to proscribe the word "God." A grave problem is before us: Will families accept education without any religion at all? Will they be satisfied to find, in the place of Christian beliefs, the theory of evolution as applied to morals? Will that suffice for the masses? Man has need of support and hope, because life is short, full of evil, and opening on the unknown hereafter so dreaded by Hamlet. This is a fact that must be admitted by positive science: it cannot hold out any consolation or hope for this need. Those who are capable of meeting this deficiency have a sure grasp upon souls. Is not man a "religious animal," as he was once designated by a naturalist? The recent and remarkable book of an able Belgian writer, Count Goblet d'Alviella, describing the religious evolution of our day, is proof positive of this statement. A non-denominational school organization, like that introduced by our last Ministry, can succeed in a Protestant country, where it will be accepted by the majority of the clergy. But in such a thoroughly Catholic country as Belgium the united opposition of the Church presents unconquerable difficulties. If a great proportion of men, and still more of women, could become unbelievers, or rather, indifferent on religious matters, there would be some chance of success. Is this attainable, and even desirable? Look at the wealthy classes, the great landowners, the peasants, and nearly all the women, and you will understand what remains to be done to have our country "deatholicized." Our small number of free-thinkers are incapable of attempting it.

Liberalism follows out the attempt made by the French Revolution, to deliver society from the rule of the Catholic clergy, in the name of philosophy, as understood in the eighteenth century. Quinet proves, by historical research, the failure and its causes. It is impossible,

he says, "to make a truly political revolution succeed without a previous religious rising, and without substituting a new for an old creed." The near future seems likely to strengthen the truth of this affirmation. A Catholic is logical. He respects the Church; he obeys it; whilst the Belgian Liberal is, in his own mind and conduct, a contradiction even to himself. He spends his life in maligning the clergy, but, at the same time, yields his wife and children, and often himself, to them. How can strength come out of such weakness?

Social reform is another stumbling-block. Political equality exists: everywhere liberty is proclaimed and guaranteed: what more is required? Is this the climax of progress? Who would dare to state that henceforward mankind will remain contented? However, if new changes are necessary, they will only be possible in the line of greater equality; and that is what Socialism desires and promises. But if these claims are put forward violently at the elections, at public meetings, or in street risings, the wealthy classes will be intimidated, and will seek refuge under the power of a tyrant, as in 1848. If the lower classes tried to solve the problem by force, they could not establish durable institutions; were they temporarily victors, their success would only cause a prompt reaction.

Thus the imperfect working of Parliamentary rule, and the straits into which we are driven by social and religious questions, will, in all probability, arouse a general European movement of reaction. Owing to the fall of the Liberal Ministry, it has, to all appearance, commenced in Belgium. Exaggerated confidence must not be placed in continued progress; history teaches us that it encounters many obstacles, and even that sometimes retrogression occurs.

But it will be said, perhaps, Could not the Liberals avoid this struggle for the schools as a religious question?—How would it be possible? The future of a country belongs to those who have the direction of education. Therefore if the clergy rule the schools, sooner or later they will be the masters of the country. So the Liberals came to the conviction that they were obliged to deprive the clergy of school authority. How then, are secular schools to be established? Is religious instruction to be entirely omitted? Or must we combat Catholicism even in the schools, as in France? Naturally, the clergy advocate their own cause, and thus provoke religious disputes, not, as during the sixteenth century, with regard to certain dogmas, but, as at the time of the French Revolution, between unbelief and natural religion.

But, it may be said, Why are Liberals afraid of clerical influence? As it will favour Christianity, there is no cause for apprehension. To that the Liberals reply: If the Catholic clergy were masters, they would not respect the liberties guaranteed by the Belgian Constitution, which M. Thiers considered necessary liberties. All Catholics, particularly in England, maintain that this is not true, and that they are calumniated. They repudiate intolerance. Unfortunately, the condemnation of modern freedom, and especially of liberty of conscience, forms part of the traditions and even of the dogmas of the Roman Church. This is a recognized historical fact. According to Lord Acton, it belongs only to ancient history; but, alas! it may be traced in modern and contemporary times. I must prove this because it is the basis and origin of the Liberal movement on the

Continent. If intolerance were not a fundamental doctrine of the Catholic Church, the hostility of the Liberals against her in all Catholic countries would be groundless.

All who wish to know the truth about this much-debated question, have only to look at the memorable and instructive debate between Bossuet and the Bishop of Montauban in 1700. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, all Protestants remaining in France were forced to go to Mass. This measure was condemned by Bossuet—out of respect, not for liberty of conscience, but for the sanctity of the Mass. The Bishop of Montauban maintained that the Church required the extermination of heretics, which he proved in the following passage:—

“Saint Leon, in his 85th letter to the emperor Leon, addressed to him these beautiful words: Great Prince, you should punish the followers of Nestorius, Dioscorus, Eutychès, and not allow discord in the Church. Saint Gregory, who was one of the mildest fathers of the church, in his sixtieth sermon on the Song of Solomon, concluded that it was better to punish heretics by the sword of temporal power, than to suffer them to continue in error. It is upon these principles, strengthened by the unchanging tradition of the Church, that the Christian emperors sanctioned laws against heretics to force them to become Catholics.” It is certain that the Church never complained of the severity of these laws: on the contrary, it has been proved that they were solicited and approved of by the Councils. A great number of special Councils, particularly that of Aquileia in 381, of Milan under Saint Ambrose in 389, of Carthage in 400, of Mitylene in 418, besought the civil power to overthrow the heretics. The third Council of Orleans (538), the sixth of Toledo (38), that of Toulouse (1119), were the precursors of the Inquisition. Pope Innocent III. and the Councils of Toulouse (1229), Arles (1234), Narbonne (1245), Béziers (1246), and Albi (1254), accomplished the organization of that terrible power which became the executive power of dogmatic intolerance. Two general Councils ordered the extermination of the heretics in words which make one shudder. See what the third canon of the fourth General Council of Lateran (1216) says, under Pope Innocent III.: “That all authorities should be warned, exhorted, and, if necessary, constrained by ecclesiastical censure, to swear officially to the zealous defence of the faith and the extirpation of all heretics from territories under their jurisdiction. Whoever exercises the least authority is obliged by oath to accept this principle. Therefore, if a lord, warned by the Church, neglect to clear his territory of the heretical pest, he shall be excommunicated by the city and provincial bishops; if he is not submissive, the Pope is to be cognisant of it within a year, so that he may liberate the vassals and deliver the territory to faithful Catholics, who, after the extermination of the heretics, will retain it without dispute, and preserve it in the pure faith. And for those who, having taken the cross, are equipped for the uprooting of heretics, is the enjoyment of the holy privileges accorded to the Crusaders.”

Bossuet is of the same opinion as the Bishop of Montauban. He says: “I am convinced and have always maintained that princes can by penal laws compel all heretics to conform to the profession and practices of the Catholic Church; also that this doctrine should be considered unalterable in the Church, which not only has followed, but

demands similar ordinances of princes."* Will it be thought that Bossuet's views are obsolete? In modern times—namely, in 1815, we have William, King of the Netherlands, giving to Belgium a constitution sanctioning necessary liberties. All the Belgian bishops published a *Doctrinal decree*, condemning freedom and the constitution as contrary to the dogmas of the Church. The following are some of the articles referring to the liberty and equality of the various creeds:—"Art. 190. Liberty of religion is guaranteed to all. Art. 191. Protection is equally granted to all religious communities in the kingdom. Art. 192. All loyal subjects, without distinction of religious creeds, enjoy the same civil and political rights, and can aspire to all dignities and occupations. Art. 193. The public exercise of any worship cannot be hindered unless it disturbs the public peace."

The condemnation of the bishops is as follows:—"Art. 190 and 191. To swear to maintain liberty of religious opinions and equal protection of all worship means the protection of error as well as truth, the development of anti-Catholic doctrines, the blending of the tares with the wheat, and the slow but certain extinction of the true faith in these happy countries. The Catholic Church has always repulsed error and heresy; she cannot regard as her children those who dare to approve of that which she has ever rejected. Art. 192. To swear fealty to a law bestowing equal rights on loyal subjects of varied beliefs, would sanction all measures entrusting the interests of our holy religion in thoroughly Catholic provinces to Protestant functionaries."

In all Concordats concluded between Pius IX. and Governments ruled by the Church, he has stipulated that the Catholic religion only should be tolerated, and all others ruthlessly proscribed. Thus, in his allocution of September 5, 1851, Pius IX. boasted of having obtained from Spain a Concordat, according to which the Catholic religion "should as formerly be exclusively dominant in the kingdom in such a way that every other religion should be banned and forbidden there." It will be remembered how these principles of intolerance were applied to Protestants. The first article of the Concordat concluded by Pius IX. with the Republic of Ecuador on September 26, 1862, was:—"The Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion continues to be the religion of the Republic of Ecuador. Consequently, the practice of no religion, and the existence of no society, that has been condemned by the Church can be permitted in the Republic." Is this ancient history? It is a recognized fact, that wherever Catholics are in the minority, as in England, they claim liberty and equality; but when they are at the head of affairs they deprive others of these rights. Veuillot said openly to the Liberals: "We refuse you liberty because

* The exposition of the Catholic faith concerning liberty of conscience is so important in the debate between Catholics and Liberals, that I give here the words of Bossuet himself. "Je declare que je suis et que j'ai toujours été du sentiment, promièrement, que les Princes peuvent contraindre par des lois pénales tous les hérétiques à se conformer à la profession et aux pratiques de l'Eglise catholique; deuxièmement que cette doctrine doit passer pour constante dans l'Eglise, qui non seulement, a suivi mais encore demandé de semblables ordonnances des Princes. En établissant ces maximes comme constantes et incontestables parmi les catholiques, voici où je mets la difficulté c'est à savoir si on a raison de faire une distinction particulière pour la messe et d'employer des contraintes particulières pour y forcer les hérétiques."—Lettre du 12 Nov. 1700. If the Gallican Bossuet admits intolerance as a dogma, certainly the Roman Church cannot deny the fact.

it is not in accordance with our principles; but from you we demand it, because it is your principle."

Do not these extracts afford convincing proof that the Liberals are justified in combating with energy the political power of the clergy? The ultra-Conservative Protestants in Holland and elsewhere are satisfied with the recent defeat of the Liberals in Belgium, for they look upon them as enemies to all religion. Are they not aware it is the manner in which the clergy use their spiritual authority to acquire power that rouses this hostility to all worship and the anti-religious rage that one meets with in all Catholic countries? It is indeed distressing to see the friends of liberty assail Christianity with such fury, since from the Gospel has sprung modern civilization; but who should bear the responsibility, if not the Catholic clergy, who have made the religion of Christ a weapon of warfare in the political arena?

Before entering the *Capella Sistina* in the Vatican you pass through a magnificent hall called the *Sala Regia*. On the walls are pictures by Vasari, representing the triumphs of the Church. Four of these frescoes show the horrors of the massacre of the Huguenots on the St. Bartholomew's eve. It was Pope Gregory XIII. who ordered the perpetuation on the walls of the Vatican of the memory of this crime, which drew tears from the eyes of old Voltaire. Stendhal says very well: "The palace of the Popes is the only place in the world where murder is publicly glorified." So long as these pictures are not obliterated, with a *mea culpa* by the head of the Catholic Church, the Liberals can say that when the Roman priests are completely masters they will enforce the dogma of intolerance.

In the remarkable and learned letter which Lord Acton wrote on November 21, 1874, in reply to the expostulations of Mr. Gladstone, he proved that Pope Pius V., who was made a saint by the Catholic Church, urged the assassination of Queen Elizabeth and the massacre of the French Protestants, conforming himself therein to the prescriptions of his faith. "He declared that a Pope who should permit the least grace to be shown to heretics would sin against faith, and would thus become subject to the judgment of men" ("*Catena*," p. 325). He required that they should be pursued until they were all destroyed—*ad internecionem usque donec deletis omnibus exinde nobilissimo isti regno pristinus Catholicæ religionis cultus restituatur* (Pii Quinti Epistolæ, p. 155). How could the Liberals fail to be alarmed with the prospect of power passing into the hands of the clergy in a country where there remains ineffaceable memories of decimated populations, of towns delivered to pillage, of Protestants slaughtered, of national prosperity annihilated, of the most atrocious persecutions committed in the name of the dogmatic intolerance which the Catholic Church continues to maintain in principle, and to apply without mercy wherever it has power?

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