

THE POLITICAL CONDITION OF BELGIUM.

BELGIUM is one of the smallest countries of Europe. With its five million inhabitants and its area of 11,000 square miles, it can exercise no influence over the events which occur on our continent. At the same time, certain questions can be judged perhaps better there than elsewhere, because they stand out prominently in relief in the national life.

Among these questions, there are two to which I wish now to direct attention: the politico-religious strife between the Liberals and the Clericals, and the action of Parliamentary government.

The politico-religious contest between Catholics and Liberals exists to a greater or less degree in all Catholic countries, and even in Protestant ones possessing, like Prussia, Catholic provinces: but nowhere is political life more completely absorbed by this antagonism than in Belgium, nowhere are the lines of the contest more clearly traced. The working of Parliamentary government deserves also to be studied in Belgium because it has worked so regularly in no other continental state.

In order thoroughly to grasp the meaning of our politico-religious strife, we must cast a glance at its origin. We find this in the constitution adopted by the Congress after the Revolution of 1830. This constitution enjoins and sanctions all the freedom and liberty which has long been the privilege of England, and of the States she has founded in America and Australia. A free press, liberty as regards education, freedom to form associations or societies, provincial and communal autonomy, representative administration—all exactly as in England.

How was it that the Congress of 1830, the majority of whose members belonged to the Catholic party, came to vote in favour of principles opposed, not only to the traditions, but also the dogmas of the Catholic

Church? This singular fact is explained by the writings of the celebrated priest and author, La Mennais, whose opinions at that time exercised the greatest influence.

La Mennais's first book, "L'Essai sur l'indifference en Matière de Religion," lowered all human reasoning, and delivered up society to the omnipotent guidance of the Pope. This work, enthusiastically perused by bishops, seminarists, and priests, established the author as an unprecedented authority. When, after the year 1828, he pretended that the Church would regain her former power by separating herself from the State, retaining only her liberty, most of his admirers professed themselves of his opinion. The Vatican was from the first uneasy at these new ideas, which were set forth with a vigour and enthusiasm comparable to the ardour of the Apostles of old; but, disturbed at the liberal fermentation which then agitated all Europe, the Pope dare not openly condemn the writer, whom all looked upon as its most powerful protector. Nearly all Belgian priests were at that time *La Mennaisiens*.

They accepted the separation of Church and State, and, in their enthusiastic intoxication, craved but liberty to reconquer the world. It was thus that Catholics and Liberals* united to vote for Belgium the constitution still in existence after a half-century. In 1832, Pope Gregory XVI., as Veillot tells us, "hurled a thunderbolt at the Belgian constitution in its cradle." In a famous Encyclical, since incessantly quoted, the Pope declared, *ex cathedra*, that modern liberties were a plague, "a delirium," from whence incalculable evils would inevitably flow. Shortly afterwards, the true author of the Belgian constitution, La Mennais, having been to Rome in the vain hope of converting the Pope to his views, was repulsed, and, a little later, cast out from the bosom of the Church. The separation was effected. There was an end to that "union" of Catholics and Liberals which had overthrown King William and founded a new political order in Belgium. It was not, however, till after 1838 that the two parties distinctly announced their antagonism, after one of our most distinguished Members of Parliament, M. Paul Devaux, had very clearly defined the different principles actuating each party, in some remarkable articles published in his *Revue Nationale*.

The Liberal party is composed of all who, having faith in human reason and in liberty, fear a return to the past, and desire reforms of all sorts. They call themselves Conservatives, because they consider it their first duty to defend the Belgian constitution, which they look upon as menaced by Rome and the Catholics. In this party, as in all others, there are many shades of opinion, from the "extreme left," who desire universal suffrage combined with socialism, and who wage endless war against Catholic worship, to the "right" who continue "faithful

* When Catholics are mentioned as opposed to Liberals, it is as regards their political, not their religious opinions. The Liberals are all, or nearly all, Catholics also; at all events by baptism.

to the faith of their forefathers," rejecting all radical innovations, and who are only separated from their adversaries by their insistence on the exclusion of the clergy from politics.

The Catholic party is guided officially by the bishops. It is composed, in the first place, of all the clergy, of the convents and monasteries, and of those who from a sentiment of religious obedience do as they are directed by the bishop of the diocese and the Pope, and also of genuine Conservatives, otherwise called reactionists—that is to say, of those who consider that liberty leads to anarchy, and progress to communism. This section comprises the great mass of the proprietors and cultivators of the soil and the country populations.

Foreigners, who cannot fail to be struck by the similitude existing in so many respects between Belgium and France, must not ignore a most important difference between the dominant ideas of the rural population of the two nations, although civil administration is the same in each. In France, with the exception of some few departments, the peasant has not only broken loose from the priest's influence, he is even most hostile to it. In Belgium, on the contrary, he submits willingly to it, as in the Rhine provinces, the Tyrol, and Canada—and even to a greater degree than in those lands hitherto considered as the Church's chosen countries, Italy and Spain. The reason for the difference is this: in France, the memory of the *ancien régime*, hard and cruel as it was in its financial administration, is detested; and the peasants, purchasers, and proprietors of the soil, have always dreaded a return of the clergy and nobility. In Belgium, on the contrary, the peasant was very happy under Maria Theresa, and never purchased the *biens nationaux*; and, as a result of this, he continues till now to obey unresistingly his priest and his landlord, never having had his faith or confidence in them shaken.

The strife between Catholics and Liberals commenced at the end of the last century. At the time of the Brabant revolution against Joseph II., a certain set accepted the notions of the French philosophers, headed by a barrister, Vonck. Another set professed Ultramontane opinions, and their leader was Van der Noot. These two parties, crushed during the French Empire, found themselves face to face when liberty was restored to the country by William I. in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Liberal tendencies were then further accentuated by the personal influence of the "Conventionnels," who, proscribed by the Restoration in France, had taken refuge in Brussels. The writings of the encyclopædists and philosophers, especially those of Voltaire and Diderot, were reprinted in cheap editions and circulated everywhere; but Liberals and Catholics united to oppose the measures of the Dutch Government—measures which, though possibly commendable in themselves, were, unfortunately, too harshly enforced.

Since the year 1838, which put an end to this momentary "Union," the antagonism between Liberals and Catholics has steadily increased,

and in the course of the last two years has found its way to the remotest village and hamlet of the country, through the revision of the law on education. It is on this ground that the combat is being waged at the present time with unprecedented violence.

From what we have just stated, we see that in Belgium parties are divided, and fight seriously for an idea; they are separated by no material, but by spiritual interests. The Liberals defend liberty, which they consider menaced by the aims of the Church. The Catholics defend religion, which they look upon as threatened by their adversaries' doctrines. Both desire to fortify themselves against a danger, non-existent yet, but which they foresee. Battles in which ideas, and, more especially, beliefs, are engaged, are certainly very violent, and are, occasionally, not unattended by peril; but, may we not add, that they honour the human species, for in such a case the coarse appetites and animal instincts of mankind are not called into play. Higher and nobler sentiments rouse and urge into action.

The educational question, which has been the centre of the political life of the country during the last two years, deserves expounding in detail. Important in itself, and more important still in its consequences, it is everywhere discussed with passion. Primary education was organized here in 1842, by a law of compromise adopted by the two parties, thanks to M. J. B. Nothomb, one of the founders of the Belgian Constitution, who died recently in Berlin, where he had been Belgian Minister for a space of upwards of forty years. This law enacted that every parish should possess schools sufficient for the number of children needing instruction; but it allowed the "commune" to adopt private schools. The inspection of the public schools and the control of the religious teaching given by the masters and mistresses, was reserved to the clergy.

Advanced Liberals began to clamour for the suppression of this latter clause as soon as they perceived the preponderating influence it gave the priests over the lay teachers. The reform of the law of 1842 became the watchword of the Liberal party, and this was ultimately effected in July, 1879; now each parish or village must provide the schools necessary for the children of its inhabitants, and must not give support to any private school. Ecclesiastical inspection is suppressed. Religious instruction may be given by the ministers of the various denominations, in the school buildings, but out of the regular hours. This system has been in force in Holland since the commencement of the present century. Lay instruction only is given by the communal masters and mistresses; no dogmas are taught, but the school is open to the clergy of all denominations who choose to enter, as it is evidently their duty to do. This system, now introduced in Belgium, has been accepted, without giving rise to any difficulties, by both Protestants and Jews, but it is most vehemently condemned by the Catholic priesthood. In spite of the exhortations to moderation constantly forwarded to them by Pope Leo XIII., the bishops have declared war to the death against

the communal schools, and, to carry on their warfare, resort to the most extreme measures. They commenced by an urgent appeal to all their faithful adherents, which was so heartily responded to, that, in less than a year they have succeeded in opening a private school in every commune and village not formerly possessing one. In this instance the Catholic party has shown a devotedness really remarkable. The large estates are generally in clerical hands, and many of the owners have built schools at their own cost, or have converted barns or out-buildings of their farms or residences into temporary school-rooms. The priests have made collections, and have given largely themselves when it was in their power to do so. Also, as in nearly every village a girls' school, established by sisters, already existed, it sufficed to add a school for boys. At the same time, in all the churches, and nearly every Sunday, the Government schools have been attacked, stigmatized as "écoles sans Dieu" (schools without God), to be avoided as the plague, and where parents were forbidden to place their children, under pain of committing the greatest sin. Those who disobeyed, and allowed their children still to frequent the communal schools, were deprived of the Sacraments of the Church. They were refused absolution at confession, and the Eucharist, even at Easter. All the schoolmasters and mistresses were placed under the ban of the Church, and the priests often even refused to pronounce a blessing on their marriage. It is only lately that, contrary instructions having been received from Rome, this extreme step is now very rarely resorted to. The Liberal majority in the House has ordered a Parliamentary inquiry—which is still in progress, and the results of which in this last six months, fill the columns of our newspapers—in order to ascertain by what means the clergy succeed in filling their schools. A Commission of three representatives visits each commune, and examines and questions different witnesses, who are summoned to appear to give evidence as to the persecutions exercised by the priests since the passing of the new law. This inquiry has brought to light unheard-of facts. Excited in the highest degree, and believing doubtless that they are fulfilling their duty, and saving Catholicism, the clergy have left no stone unturned in order to fill their schools to the detriment of the Government ones: spiritual threats; refusals to administer the sacraments at confession; menaces in sermons, and, more especially at death-beds; material privations to the obstinate; withdrawal of support from paupers and of land from tenants, suppression of Catholic custom from tradesmen, and of employment from labourers—all has been done to stamp out public education. We must admit that the result obtained has been in proportion to the immense effort made. In a very great number of villages the communal schools are almost empty, in others they have not succeeded in retaining more than half their former pupils. It is only in the large towns that the number of children attending the communal schools has not diminished. It would be hard to appreciate

at the present time—not more so from a Liberal than a Catholic point of view—the consequences of this strife respecting lay instruction. The arguments of the Liberals in favour of lay education, in a Catholic country, are the following: Those who instruct hold the future in their hands; if the clergy are to direct the school-teachers they will sooner or later be completely masters; and as the Church is opposed to modern liberties, we must prepare ourselves either to lose them or to take education entirely out of episcopal hands. As all sincere Catholics themselves admit that their Church condemns modern liberties, it is difficult to find a reply to this reasoning. We see, therefore, the defenders of liberty in all Catholic countries doing their utmost to suppress completely the influence of the Church on education. Only the Liberal party stumbles against two immense difficulties, the first really existing, the second full of menace for the future. The first is this: Many parents desire that their children should receive religious instruction elsewhere than at home, and as the priests refuse to give it in the Government schools, the parents take their children away, and thus exclusively Ultramontane schools are created and filled. The second difficulty is still more serious. It touches the future of liberty itself. The lay instructors, condemned, and attacked on all sides by the priests, become quite hostile to them. They are transformed themselves into what has been rightly called “anti-curés.” Official instruction is rendered gradually but effectively hostile to the Catholic religion, the only one known. The Government, doubtless, in nowise desires such a result; it in all probability disapproves of it, but it is the inevitable consequence of the present conflict, as we can already see in France, Italy, and Belgium. Those who regard all religion as a delusion and a falsehood, and believe that people would be better without it, may applaud this anti-religious movement; but for others, who consider that without morality, liberty cannot endure, and that true morality cannot exist without a religious basis; or that, at all events, in the present state of society, the ministers of the different denominations alone ever speak to the people of morals—these will be indeed alarmed when they consider the future of the public lay educational establishments. We can here clearly see how difficult is the position of the Liberals in this question. If they give way to the clergy, liberty will be sooner or later suppressed, at the command of the Pope. If they, on the contrary, declare open war against the priesthood, religious sentiment receives a severe shock, and, as a result of this, morality, the only safe basis for a free administration, is enfeebled.

As a natural consequence of the excessive heat of the conflict, the two parties end by justifying the accusations of their adversaries. The Liberals become anti-religionists, because religion is—and is daily becoming more and more—anti-liberal; and the Catholics are afraid of liberty, because it is used against their faith, which is, in their opinion, the only true and the necessary foundation of civilization.

For the clergy too the strife now going on in Belgium presents many dangers, and I dare not say who is right, from their point of view—the Pope, who desires to moderate it, or the bishops, who are in favour of the most extreme measures. These are the dangers: Firstly, for the elections. The priest forces many electors, against their will, to withdraw their children from the communal schools, which are evidently the best. These electors reluctantly obey, but at the ballot, which is now more strictly secret than even in England, they revenge themselves by voting against the Catholic candidates. The large number of children attending the schools established by the clergy does not prove that their influence in the country is in proportion. Secondly, those parents who are debarred from receiving the sacraments of the Church, begin to discover that the skies do not fall on their heads in consequence. If the present situation were to be prolonged, numbers of families would become accustomed to live outside the pale of the Church, and thus we should gradually reach the point they have already attained in France, where many of the peasants never set foot in church. This would be a very positive diminution of the influence of the priests.

But this is what the bishops hope. In a constitutional country the same party cannot be always in power. The Catholics will therefore, in the end, re-obtain a majority, and then they will at once proceed to pass a law most impartial and, as they say, most just, borrowed, in fact, from England. The law of 1842 will not be re-established; that of 1879 will be maintained, only it will be enacted that every private or communal school shall receive a grant from the State in proportion to the number of pupils attending it. In this manner the schools of the clergy will obtain millions, and the public schools, a great number of which are without pupils, will not have sufficient to maintain themselves. The Liberals are quite incapable of creating free schools as we, Catholics, have done. Therefore primary instruction will ultimately come back into our hands, and the Government schools will be replaced nearly everywhere by the Ecclesiastical. We are at a difficult pass just now, but let us only persevere. The more violent Liberalism becomes, the nearer it approaches its fall. The triumph of the Church is sure, for she is eternal.

I dare not say that these hopes will not be realized, and that the bishops are wrong. The Pope, an experienced diplomatist and a clever politician, would resort to compromise to avoid existing difficulties. The bishops, on the contrary, who have more faith, or, as their adversaries call it, more fanaticism, look for salvation to come to them from the extreme and radical logic of the Liberals. They repeat the proverb which events have already so often justified: "Ab inimicis nostris -salus."

On account of the attitude of the present Pope—so different from that of Pius IX.—the discord reigning amongst Catholics has been brought more to light in Belgium. On the one side are ranged the politicians,

and among these may be reckoned nearly all the Catholic representatives in both the Upper and Lower House. They lean now on the Vatican. On the other, are the fervent, the uncompromising, the men of faith. They lean on the bishops, and have as supporter of their cause a distinguished writer, M. Perin, Professor to the University of Louvain. They shield themselves, also, behind the respected name and great memory of Pius IX.

The first pretend, as did recently Lord Acton when replying to the expostulations of Mr. Gladstone, that there is no conflict between modern liberty and the dogmatic decisions of the Church. When the Liberals bring forward, in opposition to this statement, the condemnations and anathema of Councils and Pontiffs, and notably those of Gregory XVI., in his famous "Encyclical," and of Pius IX. in the "Syllabus," they make answer that hypotheses are imagined there which are not now occurring. They maintain that they can be, at the same time, submissive children of the Church and warm partisans of all the liberties consecrated by the Belgian Constitution. On the other side, taking credit to themselves for retracting not one iota from the Church's teaching, pure Catholics reproach the others for hiding the "truth under a bushel," and cowardly disowning the teachings of Rome. They say, It is not by drawing back before Liberalism that we shall succeed in vanquishing it. The nearer revolution menaces us, the more steadfastly and steadily we must hold out in opposition to it the pure Roman doctrine: *In hoc signo vinces.*

This is how the chief of the *zelanti*, M. Perin, treats the "Opportunistes" of Liberal Catholicism, in one of his writings recently published, entitled, "Le Modernisme dans l'Eglise d'après des lettres inédites de La Mennais":—

"Fear, this is the last word of this 'opportunisme,' which, even at its best proceeds from the influences, at times afar off, but always recognizable, of 'modernism;' fear, which springs from a feeling of powerlessness to repress injurious freedom, or from a persistence, emanating from sectarian error, not to see that it exists; fear, which renders those upon whom it seizes hesitating and wavering to such a degree that one asks oneself if they desire good or evil, and one is even tempted, at times, to compare them to the wretched beings whom Dante met in the halls of hell, and whom the Justice as well as the Mercy of God disdains to look upon.

'Fama di lor il mondo non lassa,
Misericordia e Giustizia gli sdegna.
Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa.'"

Quite recently a sort of *political catechism* has been published at Namur, with the approbation of the Bishop, in which the duties of a Christian citizen in a modern State are explained. The following is an extract:—

"Q. The laws and constitutions of nearly all countries recognize and establish, in principle, false liberties—that is to say, liberty for evil as well as for good. What should be the conduct of a Catholic with regard to such laws and constitutions?"

"A. He should not approve of, but observe them, making the best possible use of liberties for good, and preventing, in so far as it is in his power, all liberty for evil.

"Q. How should a Christian regard these laws and constitutions?

"A. As a necessary convention between Christians and the enemies of the Church, which must be mutually observed, but not as the normal condition in which society should exist. In addition to this he must look upon them as a permanent danger, whence revolution, and even social revolution, will inevitably spring."

This, then, is the attitude of the pure Catholics. They cannot approve of modern liberties as contrary to the Church's teachings, but they must take advantage of them in order to reconquer a majority, and, again in power, they will re-establish what they call a true Christian administration—that is to say, the administration that reigned at Rome when the Pope ruled there. It is the application of Veuillot's well-known saying, which he addressed to the French Liberals, "We claim from you liberty, your principles being in favour of it; but we refuse it to you, as ours are against it."

This too open attitude of the genuine Catholics is severely blamed by the political Catholics. When the Catechism, from which I have given extracts above, appeared, the principal organ of the Parliamentary Catholic party, *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, pitilessly attacked it. Such writings, it said, justify all the apprehensions of the Liberals. In reality, the language of this periodical must be merely a question of tactics, for it cannot ignore that, from a doctrinal point of view, the Ultramontane Catholics are in the right. Besides, the "opportunists" themselves owe obedience to the bishops, for it is their influence, combined with that of the priests, which gives all the Parliamentary Catholics their seats in the House.

Nevertheless, one can but recognize that Rome, at the present time, is inclined to lean towards Liberal Catholicism. This tendency made itself so strongly felt at Louvain, that it brought about the resignation of M. Perin, the eminent professor, who for upwards of thirty years has shown great talent and eloquence, in explaining and defending true Roman tradition, in the domain of public law and political economy.

At the communal elections, last October, the Catholic party gained ground in certain provinces where clericalism was already dominant, but in large towns it has become almost impossible for them to contest certain seats. An election for one-half of the Lower House will take place in the course of the year; only, as it is for the Liberal provinces, there is no fear of the present Ministry losing its majority.

I have often remarked that in England the difficulties which result from this ceaseless strife, between the partisans of religion and the partisans of freedom, for the maintenance of free institutions do not seem to be clearly understood. In France, for instance, no sooner was the Republican party in power, than measures were immediately taken against religious orders and Catholic instruction—measures which were

very little in conformity with the spirit of liberty. As a natural consequence of this, the clergy are now most hostile to all Republican institutions. In Belgium, the Constitution having precisely defined and strictly guaranteed liberty of every description, such measures are utterly impossible, but the reforms introduced in primary education are equally irritating to the clergy.

Now, it is impossible to conceal the fact that it is a grave danger for any free country to possess as an acknowledged enemy the dominant Church, and all the faithful who owe her obedience. If it is difficult for liberty to gain a firm footing in Catholic countries, the cause, in my opinion, arises from the permanent hostility—I may say, the divorce—of religion and liberty. Probably, before the close of the century we shall see more of the sad results of this.

The existence in Belgium of two parties so distinctly and clearly separated, offers, however, some compensation: it favours the good working of Parliamentary government. This is, in fact, the second point to which I wished to draw attention. It seems to me to possess an importance passing beyond the limits of our little country. People frequently complain of the evils brought about by party spirit, of the injustice it leads men to practise, of the narrowness of view it engenders, stifling at the same time the opinions of the minority. All these accusations are perfectly true, yet if opposite parties did not exist in a country, the mechanism of Parliamentary administration would turn to no purpose; it would not attain its end. It is in Italy that this phenomenon can be the best observed. The Italian Parliament counts among its members a larger number of distinguished men than any other representative assembly, and, at the same time, it is generally admitted, even in Italy itself, that the Parliamentary system does not realize the hopes that the country had built upon it. Power passes constantly from one hand to another, a Ministry seldom remaining for more than six months. The march of events may be briefly summed up as follows:—Interpellation made, anti-ministerial *ordre du jour* voted, Ministerial crisis, and change of Cabinet. Two or three months are then spent in reconstituting the different parties, another coalition is formed, and the same game begins again. One can but compare it to a sort of march past on the stage, where the actors enter, bow to the audience, and exit to reappear as before. There cannot possibly be any fixed idea or principle in the direction of either home or foreign affairs. The nation is far quieter and better governed when Parliament is not sitting. One of the most distinguished members of the Italian Parliament, the eloquent leader of the "right," Marco Minghetti, makes a profound study of this important problem in a book he has recent published, entitled "I Partiti Politici." This work deserves the attention of every statesman.

The present French Assembly offers the same spectacle as the Italian Chamber—a lack of organized parties. Especially, in the vast field existing between the Royalist and the extreme Radicals, there is to be

found a floating mass, numbering 350 deputies, forming groups bearing different names, but ready to turn either to the right or the left, to-day supporting the Ministry, and abandoning it to-morrow. Gambetta knew that he held no firm footing in this moving sand; he therefore selected the question of "scrutin de liste," in order to be in the minority and withdraw. If the incessant instability of the different groups tend to produce in France, as it has done in Italy, a continuous series of Ministerial crises, the country will very soon, tired to death, cry, "Gâchis, gâchis," and recall Gambetta, whose programme would be "scrutin de liste" and dissolution.

It is not at all the same thing in Belgium. We have here, as in England,—and, indeed, with a distinction even more clearly marked than in England,—two perfectly organized and disciplined parties, who march beneath the banner of a recognized chief. There is no floating element in our Parliament. Each deputy is attached to his party by cords of honour and of interest. If he were to abandon it on any important question, he would lose both his consideration and his seat. The result of this is that the Ministry has as much authority and remains as long in office, as under an absolute Sovereign. All its propositions are accepted by its adherents, and it falls only when abandoned by the country—that is to say, when the elections give the majority to its adversaries. This is why the Parliamentary administration, which we copied from England, works better in Belgium than in any other continental country.

Nevertheless, during the last twelve months a germ of division has become visible, and menaces every moment to enfeeble considerably the Liberal ranks. It is the question of the extension of the suffrage. Of late years the right of voting has been accorded either to the whole male adult population, as in France, and in Germany for the Reichsrath, or to a much larger number of electors, as in England and, at the present moment, in Italy. In Belgium the constitution gives a vote to every male adult whose Government taxation amounts to 42 frs. (about £1 13s. 6d.). In order to increase the number of electors, therefore, it would be necessary to revise the Constitution. Certain deputies at Brussels, who constitute the Extreme Left, clamour for this. Others desire to reform only the communal elections, prescriptions as to which are not laid down by the Constitution. The majority of the Liberal party dread an extension of the suffrage, because they feel that the lower orders of the rural populations, especially in Flanders, would vote in obedience to episcopal orders. On the other side, electoral reform was the watchword at the elections which have just taken place in Brussels, where Radicalism is dominant.

In its turn the Catholic party favours some schemes of reform. It has not yet demanded universal suffrage, because it rather dreads the result of the entire population being suddenly ushered into political life. The Catholics are more conservative than believing. Nevertheless

several members have already spoken in the House in favour of universal suffrage, and the others give it clearly to be understood that, rather than remain definitely in the minority, they would join with the Radicals in suppressing the taxation barrier, and in introducing in Belgium the system which has given them, in the German Reichsrath, nearly all the seats in the Catholic provinces.

In Italy, the partisans of the Pope will probably not make use of the right of vote to which the new law entitles them. They prefer abstaining, so favouring the Extreme Left, and thus upsetting the Savoy dynasty—such a revolution being the condition of the indispensable re-establishment of the Temporal Power.

In Belgium the Catholics have no desire to push matters so far; as they know that the king is scrupulously firm in fulfilling his duty as a Constitutional sovereign; all they wish is a majority in Parliament. In point of fact, as this majority would be nominated by the bishops, in obedience to the Pope, the latter would reign by interposition.

Only, if this majority were to attempt to exercise its power, as the more violent of the party desire, in definitely stamping out the Liberal party, it would lead to a most perilous revolutionary situation, and Belgium would then enter upon the painful path which France is now treading, where coercion and revolution succeed each other, and where true liberty is always misunderstood and sacrificed.

EMILE DE LAVELEYE.