

BELGIUM.

INTRODUCTION.

FROM recent changes¹ in the Belgian educational system, and from the circumstances surrounding them, valuable lessons can be derived. It is therefore an opportune time for comment. It is requisite to remember that Belgium is a country where, at least nominal, Roman Catholics very largely predominate, and where the Roman Catholic clergy have great influence; that the State system in force under the law of 1st July, 1879, was a secular one; and that the sole provision for religious instruction was that if parents wished their children to be benefited by the ministrations of the clergy, such ministrations could only be given (upon the application of the parents) before or after school hours²—the principle adopted being that religious instruction should be left to the care of families and ministers.³ The result was that religious training in school houses virtually amounted to nothing; and that the Roman Catholic authorities established primary schools, and added to the number of their secondary schools (*écoles moyennes et collèges*), all which were, and are still, largely attended.⁴ But there grew up in consequence a very bitter and deep feeling of hostility, created or fostered by the clergy,⁴ against the State system; and when the clerical party latterly obtained political ascendancy, educational reform was carried out.⁵

It is unnecessary to detail the violent agitation, almost amounting to revolution, caused by the enacting of the new law; affording, it would seem, clear proof of the impolicy (to say nothing of the injustice, which of course is always impolitic) of a State identifying itself with a non-religious or religious educational scheme, without providing that every consideration be shown towards the religious or non-religious convictions of all its subjects.

The recent Act is strongly condemned by the Liberals, but it will certainly be maintained so long as the Conservative party are in power.⁶

The reform is an advance upon that of 1st July, 1879, as more favourable to local government, especially in religious matters.

The communes have now more power: for instance, when the inhabitants in a commune are unanimous respecting religious teaching, it is open to them to subsidise, as primary schools, clerical ones, and to thereby virtually abolish undenominational schools. Even when ratepayers are not unanimous, a minority of twenty fathers of families is entitled to claim that a school shall be established for the use of their children, where religious teaching according to the views of the parents may be conducted as a main feature in education,⁷ and under certain circumstances they can indicate one or more schools that they wish adopted; the sole conditions imposed by the State being that—(a) the school must be established in a suitable place; (b) half at least of the teachers must have obtained diplomas, or have success-

¹ Note results of previous law of 1st July, 1879, now repealed; see—

(a) Remarks of M. Buis, Burgomaster of Brussels, I.E.C., vol. 13, p. 182; and

(b) Paper by M. Jottrand, vol. 13, p. 308.

The new laws, and the regulations and instructions under them, are herewith, viz.—

(a) Loi Organique du 20 septembre, 1884, sur l'Instruction Primaire, Règlements et Instructions.

(b) Extrait du "Moniteur Belge" du 10 janvier, 1886, Enseignement de la Religion dans les Écoles Primaires.

(c) Règlements et Programme d'Études des Écoles Primaires Communales, 1885.

(d) Instructions pour les jurys chargés de procéder aux examens d'enseignement normale primaire d' l'État, 1885.

(e) Programme de l'enseignement à donner dans les Écoles Normales et les Sections Normales Primaires de l'État.

The text of the law of 20 September, 1884, is substantially quoted in the Amer. Commr. Rep., 1885, for 1883-84, pp. 201, 202.

² See loi 1 juillet, 1879, art. 4; and compare with N.Z. 1877 Act, sec. 84, ss. 3.

³ See Art. 4 as above, also Art. 7.

⁴ See also "R.C.," vol. 1, pp. 24-26.

⁵ "Questions of education were at the bottom of all the Belgian political movements," &c., M. Couvreur, at Int. Ed. Conf., *Times*, 5 Aug., 1884.

⁶ But note—

(a) *Times*, 11 Aug., 22 and 23 Sept. and 25 Nov., 1884; and London *Daily News*, 1 Sept., 1884; and

(b) Remarks of M. Buis, I.E.C., vol. 13, pp. 182, 183; and vol. 15, p. 302.

For recent notices of the proceedings of the present party in power and of their promotion of prize distributions, and of the indictment of prizes in the "Avenir," and for the remark that prize distributions "are being discouraged at present in all countries where education has reached a high standard," see "Journal of Ed.," 1 Sept., 1886, p. 371.

⁷ See loi 20 septembre, 1884, Arts. 2 and 4, and note espec. extrait du "Moniteur" du 10 janvier, 1886.