

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

1877  1936 *n^o. 29*

Founded by JAMES KNOWLES.

1936

DECEMBER

No. 718. Vol. CXX.

Belgium To-day	By PAUL HYMANS, G.C.M.G.	657
Renew or Die !	By SIR LEO CHIOZZA MONEY	668
The Cowardice of the Catholic Church	By THE REV. EDWARD QUINN	684
An Irishman in Spain	By PEADAR O'DONNELL	698
Government Publications : Their Cost and Distribution		
	By B. M. HEADICAR	707
Poverty and Nutrition	By PROFESSOR A. L. BOWLEY	718
Workmen's Compensation	By ARTHUR HENDERSON, M.P.	728
Germany and the Balkans	By C. F. MELVILLE	736
Ghosts	By C. E. LAWRENCE	750
Books Received : Arthur James Balfour	By SHANE LESLIE	762
Walks and Talks	By SIR ARNOLD WILSON, M.P.	769
<i>Title Page and Contents for Volume CXX</i>	<i>facing page</i>	766

Printed and Published in Great Britain.

LONDON : CONSTABLE & CO., LTD., ORANGE STREET, LEICESTER SQUARE, W.C.2

Registered for Canadian Magazine Post.

All rights reserved.

Price Three Shillings.

Annual Subscription (Home and Abroad) 36/- post free.

U.S.A. and Canada, 75 cents.

.. ..

U.S.A. and Canada \$8.75.

Readers are invited to refer to the Classified Lists of Advertisements appearing in the Review. These include Lists of Schools, Educational Centres, etc., Small Classified Advertisements, a Register of Hotels and a Buyer's Guide.

THE
NINETEENTH
CENTURY
AND AFTER



No. DCCXVIII—DECEMBER 1936

BELGIUM TO-DAY

By PAUL HYMANS¹

RECENT developments in the domestic and foreign policy of Belgium have drawn attention to the situation of that country. These developments have not been properly understood in all quarters in other countries, and it is desirable, in Belgium's own interest, that her economic and moral position and the tendencies resulting therefrom should be justly appreciated abroad. In what follows I shall endeavour to convey a faithful and objective picture of what is at present taking place.

Eighteen months ago M. Van Zeeland assumed control of the Cabinet in extremely dangerous circumstances. For six months the Theunis Cabinet had pursued a rigorous policy of economy and deflation, a policy which had already been initiated by the de Broqueville Cabinet. But public opinion had been disturbed by these measures. Out of

¹ Translated by Randolph Hughes.

deflation had come financial embarrassment and distress, a slackening of business activity, a devitalisation of the nation on its economic side. In certain quarters a campaign was begun in favour of devaluation. In March 1935 the flight of capital went on at a greater rate than ever. The banks felt that they were in danger, and the Government was obliged to exercise a strict supervision over the exchanges. This was the prelude to devaluation, which was fast becoming inevitable. M. Theunis resigned, and the King called on M. Van Zeeland to form a new Government. The result was a Government of national union, in which the three traditional parties—the Catholic, the Liberal and the Socialist—each had a part. The new Cabinet set about devaluing the currency. The value of the franc, which was tied to gold, was reduced by 28 per cent. And shortly after the Cabinet ordered the conversion of Government stock, of which the rate of interest was fixed at the uniform figure of 4 per cent. This conversion lightened the public debt to the extent of 600 million francs; and, like devaluation, it was acquiesced in by the nation with courage and composure. Thanks to a striking discipline, to which the commercial world did not show itself refractory, it was only slowly that prices rose, and the degree to which they rose was inconsiderable. Confidence was restored; the fog lifted; the spirit of initiative made its appearance again. And, last year, the Brussels Exhibition brought thousands of visitors to Belgium and, by its splendid display and the capacity for organisation which it revealed, bore witness to a magnificent awakening of the national energies.

In short, it may be said that there has been a considerable improvement in the economic and financial position of the country since M. Van Zeeland's Government first entered upon office. The Budget has been balanced, in spite of the fact that there have been abatements of taxation; the credit of the State is in a sound condition; Government stock is at par. Everything indicates that business has entered upon a new lease of life. Since 1924 the consumption of electricity has gone up by 20 per cent.; and the number of railway-trucks allocated to industry has increased by 23 per cent. The tonnage of vessels entering and leaving Antwerp harbour grows ever larger. The number of the unemployed

has been reduced by 40 per cent. or more. Business inside the country has been revived owing to the rise of wholesale prices. On the other hand, the cost of living has risen by 10 to 11 per cent. Finally, business with foreign countries is constantly on the up grade. The figure for the increase of exports during the third quarter of 1936 stands at 25 per cent. compared with that for the corresponding period of 1935, and at 63 per cent. compared with that for the corresponding period of 1934.

The social condition of the country has not been seriously disturbed. Since the war, and in spite of the trials incidental to a time of reconstruction and crisis, no upheavals have thrown the working classes into disorder. It is true that we have been worried by strikes, in some measure a consequence of the troubles which took place a few months ago in France, when the Front Populaire Government was established in that country, but these have been brought to a conclusion without any untoward incidents. They coincided with the reconstruction of the Cabinet which followed the elections of May last. These elections modified the constitution of Parliament and led to a change in the strength of each of the traditional parties.

A new party made its appearance, the Rexists, a label derived from Rex, the term applied to it by its creator and leader, a young political agitator named M. Degrelle. This party succeeded in gaining twenty-one seats, won for the most part from the Catholics. The Communists gained seats at the expense of the Socialists. Finally, the Flemish Nationalists, who stand for the autonomy of Flanders and are no lovers of the Belgian State, won a few seats. The Liberal Party was left practically as it was before.

But the Catholic Party, which before had been the most numerous of all, was from now on weaker than the Socialist Party. It had faced the elections in conditions that were far from propitious. Dissensions had split it up into sections. Of its former great leaders none remained. Several of the important figures under whose guidance it had advanced had become engaged in financial and industrial enterprises which had been ruined or severely shaken by the crisis; a sharp reaction of public opinion against the mixing up of business and politics had constrained them to withdraw into private

life. It is this weakening of the Catholic Party which led to the emergence of Rexism. A fervent section of the Catholic youth, wearied of the past, and seeking a leader and a direction, followed Degrelle, who has the gift of playing on the passions of people; his somewhat cheap eloquence is lively, telling and entertaining, and it is the sort that is very successful with crowds.

This new party began with a moral campaign against the members of Parliament who had been involved in banking and other financial transactions. And this healthy operation of cleansing aroused no small amount of public sympathy. When the elections followed, the attraction of novelty, the appearance of young men who held out vaguely glittering hopes of renovation, the discontent aroused in the lower middle class by the crisis, the disgust inspired in certain quarters by the combinations of party groups—all this drove crowds of electors towards the Rexists. M. Degrelle himself was not a candidate. Those Rexists who were elected were for the most part mediocrities with no political experience, and the outset of their career as deputies was lamentable. After the elections, M. Van Zeeland formed a new Cabinet in which he was obliged to increase by one the representation of the Socialist Party. But the Ministry retained its character of a national union, and in the two Houses it still possessed a majority ensured by an understanding between the three traditional parties.

The new Government began by introducing measures of a social nature, meant to better the living conditions of the working classes, and in particular a Bill granting workmen holidays on pay and another Bill establishing a forty-hour week in unhealthy, dangerous or excessively laborious occupations. These reforms were favourably received by the public. They proceeded from a spirit of generosity and social justice. People trusted the Government to give effect to the project of a forty-hour week, which will come into operation only by degrees, after due consultation of commissions and professional bodies representing all the interests concerned. Parliament passed these Bills in an impressive spirit of conciliation and good will. They quickly eased the tension caused by the strikes which had broken out, and which, at certain stages, gave rise to no small amount of

alarm. There was a fear that the stay-in strikes which had occurred in France might be imitated in Belgium; but the evil was obviated. The Government showed that it was resolved to forbid the occupation of factories by employees, and to enforce respect of property and to safeguard the freedom of labour. As a result, calm was quickly restored.

The Rexist Party, however, intent on discrediting the Government and Parliament, and on dealing a blow at established institutions, continued in its efforts to stir up unrest, and carried on its campaign of insult and slander; this latter objective is one of the most prominent features of its daily newspaper. Its leader declared that he would seize power, and gave notice of a huge meeting of his partisans at Brussels on Sunday, October 25: 250,000 Rexistists were to concentrate in the capital for the purpose of sweeping the Government away! The manifestation was forbidden. The authorities took the steps required for the maintenance of order. The number of Rexistists who turned up at the rendez-vous amounted to no more than a few thousands. The unlawful assemblies were dispersed by the police and the constabulary. Degrelle was even arrested, as were some of his acolytes, and they were detained for a few hours. The whole thing had fizzled out, and was nothing more than a fiasco. The Rexistists, however, in order to increase their resources, formed an alliance with the Flemish Nationalists, who are conducting a campaign in favour of a State independent of Belgium. And this immoral move on their part aroused a storm of indignation.

To put things briefly, the utterances of the Rexistists revealed tendencies hostile to the rule of freedom and democracy, a rule to which Belgium is bound in virtue of her traditions. Behind these tendencies is a leaning towards dictatorship and an imitation of the methods and the technique employed by Hitler. The Government and the traditional parties deemed that the time had come to exercise energetic and decisive action on public opinion, with a view to setting things right again in the body politic. An oratorical campaign has been launched; it is being conducted by several Ministers and by M. Van Zeeland himself, who has eloquently harangued audiences and stirred them to enthusiasm. The Socialist Party, the Catholic Party and the

Liberal Party (this last is now under the direction of M. Laveye, a young man who has recently appeared on the political scene), following the lead given by the Government, are successfully carrying on the struggle against Fascist dictatorship and against Communism, in the name of order, liberty and national union. Everything indicates that this patriotic movement will win the approval of the immense majority of the Belgian people, and that the Government will be able to pursue in peace, and with the cordial co-operation of the traditional parties, the work of economic and moral purification in view of which it has been formed, and at the same time the consideration and application of certain political and social reforms called for by the spirit and the exigencies of our time.

The King, recently, in a speech full of wisdom, delivered on the occasion of the centenary of our provincial system of law, inculcated composure, discipline and concord. He drew attention to the possible danger resulting from a state of intellectual unrest prolonged beyond a certain stage, and pointed out that the desirable reforms could be achieved within the framework of the fundamental institutions of the nation. His noble call for toleration and moderation exercised a very salutary influence. Common-sense is one of the sound basic qualities of the Belgian character. Freedom has its roots in the very soil of the country. Belgium will courageously persevere along the path of strenuous labour, and will not allow itself to be led astray into chimerical adventures.

The orientation of Belgian foreign policy has given rise to various interpretations, some of which are erroneous and others, again, even malicious. The main lines of this policy were laid down as long as four months ago by M. Spaak, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, in a speech to the Press, and also enunciated in a royal address which caused a great stir both at home and abroad.

The King's speech, which was not originally meant to be made public, was delivered to the Ministers at the opening of a Cabinet Meeting summoned to secure the adoption by the Government of a Bill aimed at strengthening the national defences; and the Ministers, deeply impressed by the King's words, craved his permission to have them published. The

royal speech emphasised the new dangers to which Belgium is exposed :

- (1) Germany's rearmament ;
- (2) The reoccupation of the Rhineland ;
- (3) The transformation of the science of war ;
- (4) Technical progress in the domain of aviation and of mechanisation in general.

It pointed out the way in which the foundations of international security had been shaken by infringement of treaties and by the difficulty of adapting the stipulations of the Pact of the League of Nations to the condition of the world as it is to-day. These various considerations (which are nothing more than the recognition of unquestionable facts), viewed as a whole, impose upon Belgium the necessity of making a large effort to render her military defences more adequate than they have been hitherto.

The Government has tabled a Bill which, proceeding from the deliberations of a special Commission, has in view the extension of the term of military service to eighteen months, in order to provide the forces necessary for the protection of the frontiers and for the covering of the operations of mobilisation, in case of sudden attack from any quarter. This project completes the items of expenditure earmarked for war material and fortifications ; at the present moment it is under discussion in the House of Representatives.

But these Bills increasing military expenditure are naturally not very popular, and, particularly in the Flemish part of the country, they are meeting with a certain amount of opposition, arising from the fear that Belgium may be involving herself in the hurly-burly of competing international interests, and may thereby be dragged into a war that has no bearing upon any of the matters that concern her vitally. Moreover, the military agreement concluded in 1920 by the French and Belgian Governments has not ceased to engender suspicion in Flemish regions, in spite of the most definite explanations and assurances. It was thought that behind this agreement lay a political understanding, and perhaps even a secret alliance. In order to dissipate these fears, the writer, at that time Minister for Foreign Affairs, declared in the House on March 4, 1931, after securing M. Briand's assent, that the agreement in question had no

other aim than to bring the General Staffs of the two countries into contact with each other, in order that they might decide on the technical measures that should be adopted with a view to warding off an unprovoked aggression, in case the two countries should decide to act in common. This agreement, he pointed out, entailed no obligation of a political nature. The only political obligations incumbent on Belgium were those proceeding from the Pact of the League of Nations and from the Treaty of Locarno; and henceforth the military agreement took its place within the framework of this latter Treaty. M. Van Zeeland, in his turn, on March 11 last, announced, after conducting negotiations with Paris, that the Agreement of 1920 was no longer in force, but that the two countries had decided to maintain the contact between the General Staffs.

Suspicion, however, continued active in certain quarters. There is a fear that conflicts breaking out in distant territories may widen into a general struggle owing to the interaction of a system of pacts, and that Belgium may find herself engaged in such a struggle. That is why the Government has thought it necessary to define the position of Belgium in the present European situation. The policy outlined by the Government, of which the King's speech is the supreme expression, is by no means new. It would be a mistake to regard it as marking anything in the way of a break or an innovation. It represents an adaptation to the realities of the present time.

Over the space of the past ten years the state of Europe has undergone considerable modification, and we must be prepared to take an objective view of the facts. In 1925 Germany was no more than a second-rate Power, and, as a mark of her rehabilitation, she sought admission to the League of Nations, whose authority at that time was on the increase. The Locarno Pact, by mutual obligations solemnly undertaken, ensured the stability of Western Europe and thus appeared to be an effective guarantee of peace. The problems of Central and Eastern Europe had not yet arisen. It seemed that a period was at hand in which the relations between the countries of Europe would be less stained and more harmonious.

What a different picture is presented by the world to-day!

Germany has become once again a great military Power, and she makes a religion of Power and Race. Clouds are gathering in Central and Eastern Europe. The rivalry of States is intensified and made more complex by the collision of opposed political creeds. Moreover, two facts of considerable import render the state of affairs in general more delicate and more hazardous still, and are a cause of great anxiety in Belgium. The one of these is the repudiation of the Treaty of Locarno and the consequent loss of protection afforded to Belgium by the barrier of the Rhine. The other is the weakening of the League of Nations and of the guarantees afforded by the system of collective security. It would be idle to pretend that what has happened in Manchukuo and Abyssinia has not seriously diminished the authority of the League of Nations. It has been proved beyond all possible doubt that the working of the system is a lengthy and complicated affair. Twice action on the part of the League has ended in failure. And the League can grow, work efficiently, and retain its prestige, only in an atmosphere of international co-operation and good will. The spirit out of which it arose is at present undergoing an eclipse. The dangers resulting from this state of things is being felt everywhere. Everywhere are nations arming or rearming. This explains the state of opinion in Belgium and the attitude adopted by the Belgian Government. Belgium means to keep away from the clash of international rivalries in which her honour and her vital interests are not involved, to pursue an independent policy, and to take whatever steps may be necessary to protect her from attack. This policy is not new. It was enunciated in the House on March 4, 1931, by the Government of the day, and it met with universal approval. The present Government has done no more than confirm and define it still further.

Certain foreign newspapers have spread a damaging story to the effect that Belgium is preparing to throw over her friends. This is altogether untrue. Belgium remains faithful to her friends. She has not forgotten the war, the help given her by France and England, the emotions aroused by ordeals faced in common. But no more to-day than yesterday does she wish to have anything to do with an alliance or with any connexion that would subordinate her to the political designs of another Power.

She has also been represented as seeking to restore the state of neutrality obtaining before the war. Nothing could be further from the truth, as M. Spaak, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, declared in the House. The guaranteed neutrality referred to was imposed on Belgium in 1839 by the five great nations of that time who constituted the balance of power and who saw in Belgian neutrality an element making for the peace of Europe. The war put an end to this balance of power. Belgium has no intention of returning to her status under it. But she will go on applying a policy sometimes described as one of neutrality; this, however, is an ambiguous term, and it would be better to call it a policy of independence.

Again, it has been said that the Belgian Government means to withdraw from the League of Nations or to evade the international obligations of a general character imposed by the Pact on the members of the League. M. Spaak has given the lie to this accusation. We Belgians are suffering from the crisis which the League is at present undergoing. This crisis has caused us the keenest disappointment. We have energetically and wholeheartedly collaborated in the work of the League. We continue to regard the principles of the Covenant as an ideal to be striven after, and it is our wish that the nations should draw ever nearer to this ideal. And we believe that on several occasions of late it has been proved that the League is an international necessity. All the same, we cannot consider that, as things are at present, it affords a guarantee sufficiently sure or sufficiently rapid in its application. To sum up: no Belgian Government would dare to think of repudiating our international liabilities. We are in the habit of keeping our word.

But before long delicate negotiations will be begun with a view to replacing the Treaty of Locarno by a new international agreement. And the attention of Belgium at present is fixed on the problem of defining her position to-day and in the future. Her place geographically makes her a natural barrier. Thus history has given her a hazardous part to play, and she will go on playing this part. She is intent on ensuring, by her army and her fortifications, that her territory shall not be used as a base of operations or as a thoroughfare by a foreign army, and shall not become a battlefield for the

settlement of disputes between the great Powers. Her aim, as the King put it, is to avert the danger of war. Is it reasonable to expect her, in the present state of Europe, to remain, in accordance with the Locarno Pact, a guaranteeing Power with respect to two such powerful countries as France and Germany? Is it not legitimate for Belgium to think of adjusting her obligations to her actual means and resources? It would be absurd to imagine that she could, in any given conjuncture, send a neighbouring State help in the shape of men or arms. All the strength she could put forth in case of attack would be employed in securing her own defences. By preserving the integrity of her territory, by averting war, by preventing other nations from attempting to use her soil as a base from which to launch an attack on an enemy, Belgium will render a service to the cause of international order and peace, and thus will she best fulfil all her real obligations.

Such are the problems which face us, and the ideas which inform the policy of the Belgian Government to-day. It is beyond all question that these ideas have the whole weight of national opinion behind them.

PAUL HYMANS.

THE HIBBERT JOURNAL

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF RELIGION,
THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

2/6 net.

Annual Subscription 10/- (post free).

CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER include :

- Alexander Hamilton and the Reform of the League : An Historical Parallel By L. P. JACKS
- Is This a Moral World? By R. B. MOWAT
- The Supreme Spiritual Ideal : The Hindu View
By SIR S. RADHAKRISHNAN
- Philosophy and History By PROFESSOR W. G. DE BURGH
- Raising Funds for ' Good Causes ' during the Reformation
By LILIAN G. PING
- Selves By PROFESSOR JOHN WRIGHT BUCKHAM
- Archibald Allan Bowman (1883-1936) By J. W. SCOTT
- The Miracle of Lourdes By SYLVIA LEITH-ROSS
- Hesitation By LADY VYVYAN
- William Tyndale : Translator, Scholar and Martyr
By LILIAN F. GRAY
- Hope in the Slums By HORACE THOROGOOD
- A Voice from Battersea By A. H. EYRE
- Tennessee after Eleven Years By SAMUEL H. THOMPSON
- Survey of Recent Philosophical Literature
By PROFESSOR G. DAWES HICKS, F.B.A.

Applications from intending subscribers for a free specimen copy should be addressed to the Publishers :

CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.,
10 & 12 ORANGE STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

Hymans, Paul.

Table.

1. Le libéralisme et l'Église aux deux bouts du siècle. 1900.
2. La Belgique au ^{XX} siècle. 1901
3. Projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Discours. 1901
4. Jules Bata. Discours prononcé à la cérémonie d'inauguration de la statue de Jules Bata à Tournai le 20 sept. 1903. - 1903.
5. L'enseignement primaire en Belgique. 1903.
6. La politique de gouvernement et l'ingérence du clergé dans les affaires publiques. - 1904.
7. Le repos dominical.
8. La légion nationale. Discussion du projet d'agrandissement de la place d'Armes. 1906.
9. Charles Graux. 1907.
10. Les élections de 1912. Rapport présenté à l'assemblée générale statutaire de la Ligue libérale le 8-10-1912. 1912.
11. Patricisme et civisme. 1913.
12. Discussion de la prise en considération de la proposition de révision constitutionnelle. 1913.
13. Discussion de la prise en considération de la proposition de révision constitutionnelle.
14. L'éloquence au parlement. 1914
15. 1830. Les fondateurs. 1914.
16. Quelques aspects de la Belgique politiques d'aujourd'hui. 1914.
17. La société des nations. 1921
18. Causeries sur l'histoire du libéralisme belge. 1921
19. La politique étrangère de la Belgique. 1924
20. L'esprit public et les idées libérales. - 1926
21. Discours prononcés à l'inauguration du Monument. 14 oct. 1928.
22. La vie intellectuelle de 1830 à 1930. 1930
23. L'œuvre libérale d'un siècle. 1830-1930. - 1930
24. Le statut international et la politique extérieure de la Belgique. 1931
25. Une mission belge aux États-Unis (1916) 1931
26. Discours à la jeunesse belge. - 1933.
27. Le parti libéral de 1909 à 1928. - 1933
28. La Belgique et la question du Rattachement - La politique comm. de la Belg. 1934
29. Le premier chemin de fer. 1835. 1935
30. Belgique ce-day. 1936

