

## ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE IN BELGIUM.

IN the science of wealth Belgium does not occupy the position amongst other nations which we should expect from her comparative wealth, her industries and commerce. She has had her eminent scholars—I need only mention Quetelet and Émile de Laveleye—who are distinguished for their contributions to the progress of the social sciences; but they remain isolated instances, and Belgium has never been so active a centre of economic science as she has been of industrial and commercial activity. It would seem that so far the Belgians have cared more for the pursuit of well-being than for inquiry into the science of wealth.

I am inclined to think that one of the chief causes of this inferiority has been the defective organisation of higher education, the professional turn of which has checked the progress of pure science. Indeed, it is not in political economy alone that Belgian science is less advanced than we could wish; in many other departments of science it is the same. This is due, I think, to the fact that the universities are by law much engaged in granting diplomas giving the right to practise the liberal professions, and very little in training scholars. The inelastic programme of the courses, which is obligatory and was created for the annual examination, has a levelling effect upon the too numerous<sup>1</sup> university population, and prohibits the development of individualities. The existence of universities not controlled by the State (at Brussels and at Louvain) in addition to the State universities, has done nothing to modify the situation—the instruction in them is of the same character, because they also are organised principally for granting diplomas having a professional value.

This, then, is one general cause, and its worst effect is that the public has not a due respect for pure science which they consider useless.

But there is another reason for the indifference of the Belgian public—and therefore of scientific circles—towards Political Economy. It is that until the last few years there was in the political world, amongst the leaders of the leading classes, a profound apathy and extraordinary carelessness concerning the social question. Nowhere has the recognition of the urgency of social problems been so slow. England has had her trade unions; and these, together with writers on different tendencies and ideas such as Carlyle, Lord Shaftesbury, Thornton, and Harrison, have succeeded in inspiring public opinion on labour questions. In Germany the socialist movement of Lassalle, at first, and then the policy of Prince Bismarck, excited considerable interest; whilst the admirable organisation of the universities opened a free course to all scientific activities. France—after its rich efflorescence of socialist utopias and the events of 1848—had

<sup>1</sup> In 1894 Belgium had 5,300 students in the four universities.

seen the anxiety of the Second Empire in its last years to win over the working class; she took part in the tragic outburst of the Commune, and finally possessed a universal suffrage leading her more and more towards advanced opinions.

In Belgium the rapid development of industry on a large scale, which has quickly produced a dense proletariat population, should have awakened early a general interest in economic problems. It has done nothing of the sort. After the victory of the free traders, whose brilliant campaign from 1850 to 1860 so greatly excited the country, interest was turned in other directions. The middle class retained the political power, by virtue of the high electoral qualification established by the constitution (a tax of 42 fr. paid direct to the State). The working class as a body took no share in party conflicts, which concentrated themselves upon the question of the independence of the civil power with respect to the Catholic clergy, which was especially powerful in Flanders. Towards the lower classes the different Ministries which governed Belgium before 1886 have followed without exception the same policy, that of *laissez faire*. On this point there has not been the slightest difference of opinion amongst them. M. Malou, and then M. Beernaert, the heads of the Catholic party, were of the same school as M. Frere-Orban; and their bourgeois partisans carried out with the same ardour the recommendation of Guizot: 'Enrich yourselves,' without troubling themselves at all about other matters. It is difficult to imagine the ignorance, not only of the public at large, but of eminent statesmen, as to the literature of political economy. I well remember the great astonishment of a notable party leader in 1888, when I told him that his economic principles were called individualism as opposed to socialism. The daily papers and reviews rarely contained articles upon economic or social questions. There was no special review on Political Economy, and the Political Economy Society met only once a year at a dinner where the guests were on most points completely of one mind. The writings of Émile de Laveleye were read only by foreigners. At the universities there was no special instruction in the social sciences; the few students who wished to perfect themselves in these studies were sent to Germany and Paris.

To-day all is changed. The whole of Belgium is delivered over to economic controversies. The monthly and daily papers are full of them; the principal articles are upon Free Trade and Protection, Socialism and Individualism, Private Property and Collectivism, industrial legislation, trade unions, working class insurance, and colonisation. All have heard of Adolf Wagner and Albert Schäffle; Karl Marx is read, or at any rate quoted; the programmes of the labour parties are studied by every one; there is an alarming demand for statistics. Pamphlets and books are multiplied. Societies are being formed, congresses assembled, special reviews started, and even in the universities new chairs are created, and a special course of

instruction instituted. In meetings, conferences, sermons, only one question is raised—the Social Question; and Parliament itself would have presented the strange spectacle of a grand academic debate, announced for last January, if the necessities of political life had not reminded our legislators that they were elected to make laws.

In the course of a few years Belgium has been obliged to undergo a profound transformation in her political organisation. She could not long escape the anxieties which were taking possession of the other nations, and from which the strong political position of the bourgeoisie, combined with the docility of the working classes, seemed to have protected her.

No precise starting point can be assigned for the profound change in thought which has taken place. It has often been attributed to the serious strikes of March, 1886, which with their accompaniments of pillage and incendiary fires startled the leading classes. It is true that these tragic events have reacted upon public opinion, and have in this way affected the rulers; there is no doubt that they gave rise to the great inquiry of the *Commission du travail*, where the projects now before the world received their first elaboration.

But this is not enough to explain the general change in the direction of ideas; there had been serious strikes more than once before 1886, and they gave rise to no such wave of feeling. The truth is that our little country has been unable to detach itself from the rest of the world, or to escape the effects of the mysterious evolution which is working with the irresistible and fatal force of the natural elements in America as in Germany, in France as in England. Already in 1880 one section of the Liberal party were demanding re-  
vision of the Constitution and universal suffrage with such energy and persistence that after it had caused the fall of the Liberal Ministry in 1884, the "Reform" forced itself upon the Catholic party in 1892. In 1885 the Labour party was formed, and a movement which failed in 1868, when the *Internationale* was covering Belgium with labour associations, found success easy, rapid, and increasing amongst a people of workers now awaking from its long torpor. The strong organisation of this Labour party, supported by rich co-operative societies, chiefly bakeries, gave to the agitation of the 'progressives' for electoral reform that popular support which was necessary for success even under a Conservative Ministry. The democratisation of the Belgian Parliament followed that of the French Parliament, of the Reichstag, and indeed of the House of Commons; notwithstanding the wise and ingenious limitations imposed upon universal suffrage by the system of the plural vote, thirty socialist representatives were in last October sent to the House in place of Liberal bourgeois deputies. Thus the fears of the bourgeoisie and the hopes of the proletariat have been quickened, and have deeply stirred the minds of men.

I wish now to indicate such points as may be necessary to enable the readers of this Journal to understand the present state of eco-

conomic literature in Belgium, and of the different groups contributing to it. More especially I shall describe the higher educational institutions.

To the *Université libre* of Brussels belongs the honour of having first organised in Belgium a special course of instruction in social sciences, a step which marked the accession to the "rectorat" of M. van der Rest, Professor of Political Economy in the Faculty of Law. The scepticism which M. van der Rest professes with respect to sociology conceived as a general science of society<sup>1</sup> does not deter him from actively promoting the development of the social sciences. The organisation of the school at Brussels is interesting in more than one respect; it is conceived in such a way as to encourage original research, and to leave the greatest freedom to its professors in determining the subject of their teaching. Its most original feature is the association of natural science courses with those of the social sciences; thus every year's courses are given by professors of the *Facultés* of the sciences and of medicine. I may mention the following titles:—Chemistry of foods, history of physiology, social hygiene, social nosology, social pathology, organic bodies (vegetable and animal). The history of religions, Aryan antiquities, experimental psychology, special subjects in general and administrative law, the history of the penal system, have also appeared in the syllabus, together with the course of the social sciences properly so-called.

Since the foundation of the school, lessons on the history of social systems have been given there by M. Hector Denis, a sociologist of great learning, now ardently engaged in political strife (he sits in Parliament as deputy of the Labour party and of the progressive party), who belongs to the advanced wing of scientific socialism. As is well known, he explained his conception of socialism in a remarkable "discours de rectorat" (Brussels, 1893), and that he has just published a considerable work, which is the result of several years' study, called *La Dépression économique et sociale et l'histoire des prix* (Brussels, 1895) with an atlas of diagrams.

M. G. de Greef now teaches at *l'Université Nouvelle*, but we must mention here the courses on the methodology of the social sciences, on the evolution of political doctrines, and on the general structure of societies which he gave in previous years at the school of social sciences at the *Université libre* of Brussels. M. de Greef belongs to the same economic school as M. Denis. He has devoted himself especially to constructing a general sociology, towards which he has written two introductory volumes (Brussels, 1886, 1889), of which a *résumé* may be found in the *Lois Sociologiques* (Paris, Alcan, 1893). His last work appeared in 1895 under the title: *Le Transformisme Social* (Paris: Alcan).

M. Adolphe Prins, whose name is also found amongst the professors

<sup>1</sup> See the two papers: *La Sociologie* (1888), and *L'Enseignement des Sciences Sociales* (1889).

of the school of social sciences, does not teach Political Economy, but he has published two noteworthy books concerning economic history and philosophy. Émile de Laveleye wrote a preface for one of them: *La Démocratie et le régime parlementaire* (2nd ed., Brussels, 1887). The other, *L'Organisation de la liberté et le droit social*, published this year, is one of the most suggestive books which have appeared in Belgium for a long time. M. Prins is not a Socialist, but neither is he of the orthodox school. If I were to compare him with any eminent economist it would be with Brentano, many of whose doctrines he has accepted, and to whom he is intellectually akin in more than one respect.

The *Université Nouvelle*<sup>1</sup> which was founded last year at Brussels in opposition to the *Université libre*, where the instruction was thought to be 'réactionnaire ou retardataire,' includes not only an *École libre d'enseignement supérieur*, but also an *Institut des hautes études*, which may be said to be the home of Socialism, many of the professors being connected with the Labour party. Amongst them we must mention, in addition to M. de Greef, M. Edmond Picard, a barrister and Socialist Senator, the celebrated anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus and M. Émile Vandervelde, the brilliant young leader of the Belgian Labour party, who, before astonishing political circles by his oratorical talent and the skill of his parliamentary tactics, had made himself known by publishing a well-written book on the *Associations professionnelles en Belgique* (2 vols. Brussels, 1892).<sup>2</sup> Another distinguished economist appears in the professorial body of the *Université Nouvelle*: M. Ernest van Elewyck, author of a book full of facts and arguments in favour of free trade, called *Les Salaires et la protection* (Bruxelles, 1894).

Besides the two establishments just mentioned there are in Brussels two interesting institutions which I believe to be quite without counterparts; they are *l'Institut des Sciences Sociales* and *l'Office international de Bibliographie Sociologique*.

The latter had its origin in the bibliographical collection organised by its members for the *Société d'Études sociales et politiques*, which was founded in 1890 by the late M. Aug. Couvreur, formerly vice-president of the Chamber, and a protagonist of free trade, who took part in the glorious campaign of 1850-1860. This collection, which was originally intended merely to give information to members of the Society and to assist them in their work, gradually extended itself, and ended by including in its scope—under the active direction of M. Henri Lafontaine, now socialist senator—the whole bibliography of the

<sup>1</sup> Edm. Picard: *Une Nouvelle Université à Bruxelles* (Extrait de la *Société Nouvelle*). Brussels: Monnom, 1894. A pamphlet of twenty-two pages. Also the organ of the Institution, *L'Université Nouvelle* (monthly), No. 1., October 7th, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to many articles in different Belgian and foreign reviews, M. Vandervelde has published—together with M. Jean Massart, a distinguished naturalist, a curious and paradoxical little book: *Parasitisme organique et Parasitisme social* (Paris, 1893), which I recommend to any one interested in the abuse of the assimilation of the social to the biological sciences.

social sciences. The *Office* has now set itself no less a task than to draw up a complete catalogue of everything relating to the social sciences, facts as well as writings. It publishes periodically a *sommaire méthodique des traités, monographies, et revues* in two parts, one bearing upon Sociology, the other upon Law. It has foreign correspondents, and its founders have contributed to it forty thousand items upon which to work.

This same office of bibliography has this year resumed the publication of the *Revue Sociale et Politique*, which for four years was the organ of the society founded by Couvreur, and in which were reproduced the interesting debates of the Society, which at one time gathered together a large number of Belgian politicians, publicists, and scholars of all parties.

The office of bibliography is closely connected with the *Institut des Sciences Sociales*. This is the work and the hobby of a rich business man of enlightened and original views, M. Ernest Solvay, formerly a senator.<sup>1</sup> M. Solvay aims at the gradual and peaceful transformation of society, and thinks that the fundamental injustice of the present organisation is in the *inequality of opportunity*. In order to diminish it as much as possible he proposes to substitute for all existing taxes a single tax upon successions, which would have the triple advantage of completely exempting from taxation all the earnings of labour, of avoiding the present shifting of the burden of taxes, and of permitting public services to be worked without a profit. But to avoid any fraud in the collection of the single tax it would be necessary to have some means of knowing exactly the wealth of individuals; and this is the aim of the "*comptabiliste*" system, which constitutes the State a clearing house for all citizens, entirely abolishes money, and, in consequence, all those institutions which are concerned in the exchange of money. Such is M. Solvay's plan of social reform, and it is for the purpose of submitting it to the test of searching scientific study that he has founded his institute. There, under the direction of Messrs. Denis, De Greef, Vandervelde, and the founder, the direct and indirect consequences will be investigated of the abolition of money, and of the introduction of the single succession duty, together with any means of preparing for and realising the reform. M. Hector Denis has drawn up a vast programme of research in economic sociology, connecting it with M. Solvay's hypothesis<sup>2</sup> in such a way that, while keeping in view a special and limited object, the Institute may also serve largely to promote general studies. He publishes monthly certain *Annales* (as a supplement to the *Revue Universitaire*) in which the accounts and *résumés* of books have so far occupied most space. Whatever opinion

<sup>1</sup> *Le Programme de l'Institut des Sciences Sociales, and Comptabilisme et Proportionnalisme Social*, by Ernest Solvay (*Annales de l'Institut des Sciences Sociales*, No. I., June, 1894).

<sup>2</sup> See No. I. of the *Annales* mentioned above.

we may hold as to M. Solvay's idea, we must acknowledge that his enterprise is most interesting, and that social science will certainly profit by it.

The Catholic University at Louvain instituted in 1892 a school of social and political sciences. It is only fair to note that for years past M. Victor Brants, the learned professor of political economy, had already succeeded in arousing a circle of students to serious interest in the social sciences, by means of a *conférence* on social economy, which takes the form of an association of students, and which has existed for ten years. Studies, discussions, and excursions are directed by the professor.

In 1891, at the Catholic Congress at Malines, M. van den Heuvel, professor of law, won approval for a proposition to found a political and social school at Louvain. It was this project which was realised in the following year. The school at Louvain is based upon the principles which are now to be found in similar organisations in Belgium: specialisation in the subjects taught, greater liberty for the student, and the condition that he should undertake original work. The instruction extends over two years. It is open only to doctors of law, and results in a diploma, that of doctor of social and political sciences, which can only be obtained after the writing of a thesis. The programme of the course varies. In addition to special courses on comparative constitutional law, international law, political and parliamentary history, it contains comparative labour legislation, comparative legislation on credit and speculation, the commercial politics of Belgium and the principal States, and taxation.

M. Victor Brants belongs to the school of Le Play; he is perpetual secretary of the Belgian Society of Social Economy, which is closely allied to that of Paris. His work is already considerable; in addition to researches in economic history he has written manuals full of erudition. Last year he published a study in comparative legislation: *Le Régime Corporatif au XIXe siècle dans les états germaniques* (Louvain 1894), and this year, *Les théories économiques au XIIIe et au XIVe siècles* (Louvain 1895). With him M. van den Heuvel directs the instruction in constitutional law, together with one of his distinguished pupils, Professor Dupriez.

The professorial body of the school of Louvain used also to include amongst its members M. Nyssens, now Minister of Industry and Labour, who introduced the plural vote into the Belgian electoral system at the time of the revision of the Constitution.

Amongst the students of Louvain who have distinguished themselves should be noted (in addition to the professors of Gaud and of Liège, whose names will be found later on) M. Cyrille van Overbergh, now chief in the Cabinet of the Minister of Justice, who has written a good book on *Les Inspecteurs du travail dans les fabriques et les ateliers* (Louvain, 1893).

The volumes of the *Ouvriers des Deux Mondes*, published by the

successors of Le Play, contain more than one monograph prepared under the direction of M. Brants; six 'thèses de doctorat' have already been published since the foundation of the school of political and social sciences. Since 1893<sup>1</sup> the two state universities have been endowed for special instruction in the social sciences, organised principally for the benefit of students in law, but accessible also to all who are qualified to take the university courses. The courses recently added to the programme include especially advanced political economy, economic history, science of finance, the regulation of labour in comparative legislation, statistics, and comparative civil institutions. There are, besides, courses in parliamentary history, in comparative law (public and administrative), and courses in international law.

The characteristic features of this curriculum, features which are also happy innovations in the other Belgian universities are the specialisation in the subjects, which vary from year to year, the great amount of freedom left to the students in the choice of their courses, and the multiplicity of practical courses in imitation of the German 'Seminären.' The courses are divided into three sections: political sciences, administrative sciences, and social sciences, each leading to a 'licence' and a 'doctorat.' The title of doctor can only be obtained after the completion of some original work.

The attendance at these new courses has not, so far, been as satisfactory as was expected; it may be that so long as no material advantages are attached to the diploma, it will attract only a very limited number of students. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that there will be some who will distinguish themselves in the original research for which facilities formerly unknown are now given.

At Ghent Professor R. de Ridder represents the liberal school, enlightened by a learned and well-informed criticism. Under his guidance there was formed in 1891 a *Société libérale pour l'étude des sciences et des œuvres sociales*, where much attention is paid to the study of practical social reforms. Amongst the staff of the new courses are two young authors, who studied at the Catholic university of Louvain, and who completed their studies in Germany: Mr. O. Pyfferoen, author of a study of the administration of the town of Berlin, which has attracted attention, and of a recent book on *Les Réformes Communales* (Brussels, 1895); and Ernest Dubois, whose last work has been reviewed by the present writer.<sup>2</sup> The course on comparative civil institutions is given by M. Herman de Baets, who, at the last meeting of the *Fédération des Avocats belges*, delivered a brilliant and vehement indictment against the civil code, and demanded search-reforms in the name of the disinherited classes. Economic history

<sup>1</sup> Since 1877 there had been a 'doctorat en sciences politiques administratives,' but the instruction had been reduced to two or three courses, and formed no systematic whole.

<sup>2</sup> See ECONOMIC JOURNAL, vol. v. p. 262, No. 18, June 1895.

is taught by two professors of the Faculty of Philosophy, M. Henri Pirenne, a very distinguished mediæval scholar, and M. G. Hulin, an original logician who is not above interesting himself in the history of landed property.

At Liège the Catholic school is represented by M. Charles Dejae, who holds the chair of political economy in the Faculty of Law, and has made a special study of labour contracts and labour accidents; M. Édouard van der Smissen, whose book on population, which won the prize from the Academy of Moral and Political Science at Paris, was reviewed in the *ECONOMIC JOURNAL*;<sup>1</sup> and M. Godefroid Kurth, a Catholic historian of great reputation, whose opinions on economic matters go as far as the most advanced doctrines of Christian democracy.

Along with them the author of this paper does his best to continue the instruction of Émile de Laveleye, as a follower of 'socialism of the chair.'

Political economy is of course studied elsewhere than in the institutions for higher education. It would be impossible to quote here all the matters which have been made the subject of recent books and pamphlets; but it would be unjust not to mention the success of the two congresses of Antwerp on customs legislation and the regulation of labour in 1892 and 1894.<sup>2</sup> There assembled then not only a number of Belgian and foreign economists, but men of business whose opinion on economic matters is not to be neglected. These congresses were presided over by M. Louis Strauss, honorary consul, who represents in Belgium the classic school in all its purity. The *Revue Économique* (published weekly at Antwerp) defends economic liberty on every occasion with energy.

M. Julien Weiler, an engineer and orthodox liberal, has made himself apostle of arbitration and conciliation in this country, not only in well-known pamphlets,<sup>3</sup> but also by organising very successful boards of conciliation in the coal mines of Mariemont (Hainaut).

M. Ch. de Queker, secretary of the *Bourse du Travail* at Brussels, whose principal work, *Étude sur les Questions Ouvrières*, appeared in 1892 (Brussels), and M. Morisseaux, Director of the recently-formed *Office du Travail*, defend with less strictness the non-intervention of the State in economic matters. M. Morisseaux is the author of a large work on Comparative Labour Legislation, by which he has won one of the King's prizes. The work is to be shortly published.

Amongst the functionaries of the new Labour Department must be

<sup>1</sup> See *ECONOMIC JOURNAL*, vol. iv. p. 298, No. 14, June 1894.

<sup>2</sup> The accounts of the meetings and the reports form two volumes for each Congress, published at Antwerp in 1892-3 and 1894-5.

<sup>3</sup> M. Weiler has translated into French Crompton's *Industrial Conciliation*. His last pamphlet is called: *L'Esprit d'Autorité et la Conciliation Industrielle*. Brussels, 1894.

mentioned M. Julin, who has made himself known by his statistical work on working-men's budgets.

The Labour Office will no doubt issue periodical and other publications in addition to those of the *Conseil Supérieur du Travail*, the discussions and reports of which already form a collection of interest.

I think I have said enough to give some idea of what Belgium is doing in the sphere of Political Economy. It is likely that a few years will see the growth of a whole literature of economics in Belgium. Thanks to the changed character of political struggles—thanks to the urgency and variety of the questions before the public—an impulse has been given, and will not be checked. It has taken possession of the younger generation, and of higher education. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that Belgium will make good the time she has lost, and win for herself the place she should have held long ago.

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### THE NEW FACTORY ACT.

WHETHER or not Mr. Asquith was right when he said, in July last, at Ashton-under-Lyne, that the new Factory and Workshop Act (which comes into operation in January next) 'is the largest measure that has been passed in our time for the benefit of the working classes,' it is, at any rate, certain that this statute, in piloting which through grave and numerous obstacles to its progress the late Home Secretary displayed a most remarkable degree of ability and tact, is one of great importance. The trouble is that its provisions consist of details so minute and so multifarious, that to do anything like justice to its ramifications is, within available limits, altogether impossible. Briefly stated, the Act is a 'repair job,' the object aimed at being to close up the weak places in the defence against oppressive conditions of labour erected by the previous legislation; and the net result of its enactment is to make this defence considerably less inefficient than heretofore. Thus, while up to now it has been illegal for an employer to herd together his workpeople in 'over-crowded' workrooms, there has never been any precise definition of what is meant by 'over-crowding.' The new Act requires the provision of at least 250 cubic feet of space for each worker, or 400 while overtime is worked; and notices stating how many persons may be employed in each room must be posted up. So far so good. But, on the one hand, no medical authority will be found to say that 250 cubic feet of air-space per worker are enough to satisfy the requirements of health; nor, on the other hand, is it sufficient to compel the provision of air-space unless you at the same time insist upon the maintenance of a specified standard of ventilation. For even a big room, if not thoroughly ventilated, soon gets intolerably