

to her ever-growing commercial prosperity; but few persons, probably, have other than a vague idea of the marvellous strides the Belgians have made, and continue to make, in the development of their many resources. It is only by examining in detail the various elements that go to the material advancement of a nation, we shall be able adequately to appreciate the immense progress that has marked the history of the country since it shook off the Dutch connection in 1830. Half-jestingly, half-contemptuously, Frenchmen sometimes speak of their neighbors as les petits Belges, the slight implied in the phrase is, however, far from being deserved; for, the little Belgians have in many respects shown themselves much superior to their critics. The density of population, the manufacturing and commercial position to which the kingdom has been raised, the gratifying spread of education, not to speak of the civil and religious liberty which her citizens enjoy, are in striking contrast with the condition of things existing under the Republican regime in France. The growth of population has been unusually rapid. In 1831, the territory embraced by the new kingdom numbered 3,786,000 inhabitants; on the 31st of December, 1904, the population reached a total of 7,075,000, an increase in the interval of nearly 87 per cent. Belgium is, in fact, one of the most thickly-peopled countries in the world. With its 622 inhabitants to the square mile, its density is more than double that of Germany or Italy, more than triple that of France, of Austria, or of Spain. Were Ireland proportionately peopled, she would count to-day within her four shores, a population of at least twenty millions.

Agriculture and Trade

Although agriculture is widely and successfully carried on Belgium is largely dependant on foreign supplies for her food; hence her inhabitants are impelled to industrial activity, in order that the products of her manufacturers and various workers may enable them to purchase abroad the food-stuffs and raw materials needed for the national consumption. The progress of industrial enterprise has accordingly gone on pari passu with the growth in population. Contrasting the present commercial situation with that which existed seventy years ago, we find that the total imports, which in 1835 were estimated at less than eight millions sterling, rose to upwards of 138 millions in 1906, and the total exports from six and a quarter millions to 112 millions. In other words, although the population had not quite doubled within the above period, the volume of trade had increased twenty-three fold. The imports and exports give a greater average per head of trade than those of Great Britain, they are nearly three times the German or French averages, four times greater than those of the United States, and seven times greater than those of Italy.

The expansion of trade has naturally led to the improvement of facilities for transport and the increase of rapid means of communication. Perhaps in no other part of Europe has the feature of our modern economic conditions being so nobly exemplified as in Belgium. The country is covered with a network of railways, its system—not including steam trams or light railways—extending over some 2830 miles, which for every 1000 inhabitants, is one and a half times that of Great Britain, twice that of France, and three times that of Italy. Remarkable as the above record is, it does not include all the rail accommodation provided for the public. The main systems and their connections are fed by no fewer than 145 lines of chemins de fer vicinaux, or light railways, of which the Belgians were prompt to recognise the possibilities for the purposes of trade and travelling. The first of these lines, 13½ miles in length, was opened in 1885—at the close of December, 1905, the total length of the various lines in operation was 1704 miles, whilst at the same date some 546 miles were under construction or about being commenced.

The third-class fare on the railway amounts to but a shade over a halfpenny a mile, not quite a penny for second class, and the return journey can be made for a trifle over a fare and a half. As is pretty generally known, nearly the whole of the ordinary or broad gauge system is the property of, and is worked by the State; the light railways have been constructed for the most part by the Societe des Chemins de fer Vicinaux, with capital provided by the State, the Provinces, and the Communes, the State subsidy usually amounting to a third of the cost. The thrift of the people is illustrated by the deposits in the Savings Bank, the amount standing to the credit of depositors in December, 1904, was over 21 million sterling. And what is more interesting, and perhaps more important, this very considerable sum was distributed among 2,205,000 depositors: There is thus a post office bank account

for about every three persons of the entire population.

Education

At the close of December, 1904, the number of children on rolls of the primary schools subject to State inspection, was 859,436; of the attendance in the 'free' schools not subject to official examination, no returns are available. In 1903 the State, Provincial, and Communal subsidies for elementary education came to nearly £1,700,000.

For secondary instruction ample provision exists in the Government athenees, and in the numerous high schools official and other. The State secondary institutions had an attendance of 33,122 students, on the 31st December, 1904, but to this number should be added the population of the many colleges and high schools under exclusively Catholic control. The attendance in these colleges and schools is, it is safe to say, greater than in the Government secondary establishments.

The Belgian educational edifice is crowned by four Universities, of which two, Ghent and Liege, are State institutions; the other two, that of Brussels and that of Louvain, are entirely independent of Government control, and consequently receive no assistance from the State. The total number of undergraduates in the year 1904-5, was 6098—or more than five times the number receiving a similar education in 1830—the Catholic University of Louvain coming first with 2,134 students. It is instructive to learn that of the entire University population in the academic year 1904-5 at least 33 per cent were attending the special schools of mining, engineering, commerce, agriculture, etc., an evidence of the growing importance attached to purely professional training. In 1890 the proportion was but 15 per cent.

As might be expected in a country so conspicuous for industrial enterprise technical instruction receives a large amount of attention and encouragement from Government and municipal bodies. That the Belgians fully recognize the necessity of special training for youths destined for industrial or manufacturing pursuits, may be inferred from the fact that in 1903-4 there existed throughout the country 280 institutions in which a strictly commercial, professional, or technical training was imparted, the number of students being about 43,000, of whom 8,250 were girls. Belgium has been the first European State to attempt a practical solution of the old-age pension difficulty, as it has been the first to legislate for the satisfactory housing of the workers. M. Payen, a distinguished member of the French Institute, was well within the truth, when he wrote some time ago, that of all the European countries Belgium has in these latter years, made the noblest and most successful efforts for the furtherance of social progress. To the Catholic party, in the Chambers and in the country, must be awarded the praise of having initiated and carried through those schemes of social betterment which have not only been admired but imitated by other nations. For now more than twenty years Catholics have had the administration of the national affairs: Belgium is, in fact, the only country in Europe with a distinctively and professedly Catholic Government.

In the steady development of the nation's resources, in the rapid growth of commercial prosperity, in the satisfactory spread of education, in the generous encouragement given to the arts and sciences, in the orderly advance of social reform, we have conclusive evidence that 'reactionary clericals' are no enemies to genuine progress or true enlightenment.

Presentation to Mr. W. T. Ward, Dunedin

Mr. W. T. Ward, who has been appointed postmaster at Palmerston North, was presented at the Chief Post Office, Dunedin, on Thursday afternoon with a solid silver tea service, suitably inscribed, by his fellow-officers. Representatives of all departments were present on the occasion.

The Chief Postmaster (Mr. W. St. G. Douglas), in making the presentation, referred to the recipient's 18 years' connection with the office, and on behalf of the staff congratulated him very heartily on his well-merited promotion. In all the responsible offices he had held—head of the Money Order Department, chief clerk, and acting postmaster—Mr. Ward had ever displayed marked ability, and had always discharged his duties in a conscientious manner. They accordingly regretted the departure of their comrade from amongst them. He was always kindly and courteous, both as a superior officer and man. He (Mr. Douglas) had to acknow-