

## EDUCATION IN BELGIUM

### SOCIALISTS AND THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS

About two months ago, as we were informed by cable, the Belgian Premier, acting for himself and his colleagues, tendered the resignation of the Cabinet, which was accepted by King Albert. The following day Baron de Broqueville, a member of the late Ministry, was entrusted by the King with the task of forming a Government. The retirement of the Schollaert Cabinet took place under very unusual circumstances. In Belgium, as elsewhere, the school question is the battleground of parties, and it was an attempt to settle this vexed question which caused the resignation of the Cabinet. Some five months ago the Schollaert Government introduced an Education Bill, exceedingly moderate in character, embracing reforms the majority of which were demanded even by their political opponents. Among other provisions of the Government scheme it was proposed that school attendance should be compulsory up to the age of fourteen years, that instruction should be gratuitous, and that two years should be added to the studies of the present programme, the time to be mainly devoted to the elements of professional or technical training. The scheme also contemplated a substantial improvement in the pay and prospects of elementary teachers. There was, however, another important reform set forth in the Government measure, and it is over this proposed reform the battle raged for three months. M. Schollaert, the Minister responsible for the Bill, introduced a provision stipulating that the communal authorities should each year give to every head of a family in the commune

#### A 'Bon Scolaire'

—a sort of money order representing a certain sum in payment of school fees—for each child of the family between the ages of six and fourteen. With this 'bon scolaire' the parent was at liberty to send his children to the school of his choice—to the official school or the denominational school. The amount represented by this 'bon' was to come in part from the State, in part from provincial funds, and in part from communal funds. The Government scheme of educational reform embraced two or three changes for which both Liberals and Socialists have long been clamoring: it provided for obligatory school attendance, it raised the age to which primary instruction should be continued, and it added a two years' course to be devoted in great part to preliminary professional training. With these provisions the Opposition had no quarrel; but the 'bon scolaire' had the same effect on both Liberals and Socialists that the proverbial red rag has on the proverbial bull. It rendered them furious. In their eyes it was simply preposterous that the essentially Catholic schools should be placed on a footing of financial equality with the official establishments, that the communal administrations should be bound by law to contribute even indirectly to the support of primary schools other than those immediately under their control. In vain it was urged that this provision respected the right and guaranteed the liberty of the father to have his child educated in accordance with his own conscientious convictions, whether religious or the contrary. This right and this liberty Liberals as well as Socialists deny to parents. M. Vandervelde was frank enough to declare a short time ago in the Chamber: 'I do not admit this

#### Principle of the Liberty of the Family.

Above the liberty of the father in the family, there is the right of the child.' The Socialist leader thus ignores the right of the Catholic parent to have his children brought up in the Faith which he himself professes; at the same time he ignores the right of the child to receive a moral and religious training.

No sooner was the new Education Bill presented to the Chamber than the anti-Catholic Opposition started a noisy agitation which, however, found little or no responsive echo outside some of the great towns. Meetings were held denunciatory of the projected re-

forms, in which appeals were made to the worst anti-religious prejudices; revolutionary violence was even threatened should the Bill receive Parliamentary sanction. Think of it! Twenty millions (francs) to go annually to the coffers of the convents! In the Chamber a system of organised obstruction, pursued during several weeks, brought the legislative machine to a standstill. Public business being thus impeded, and the internal political situation becoming seriously troubled, King Albert deemed it expedient to seek the advice of some of the most experienced Ministers of State, among them MM. Beernaert and Woeste, and M. Cooreman, President of the Chamber. After having had

Several Interviews with the Sovereign and frequent consultations with his Ministerial colleagues, M. Schollaert came to the decision to offer his resignation, in which he was followed by all the other members of the Cabinet. The King, it is stated, was desirous that the Bill should be withdrawn, but M. Schollaert did not see his way to accede to the royal wishes, being evidently of opinion that he held power, not to carry out the policy or fulfil the behests of his adversaries, but to comply with the unanimous demand of his Catholic supporters throughout the country.

That the energetic attitude adopted by M. Schollaert in the crisis had the cordial approval of the Right was unmistakably shown by the enthusiasm with which he was acclaimed when he announced the resignation of the Cabinet at the sitting of the Chamber. The Catholic deputies vociferously cheered the announcement, and repeated cries of 'Vive Schollaert!' rang through the House, while counter-cries of 'Vive le suffrage universel!' 'A bas les convents!' and 'Vive la République!' were proffered from the Opposition benches. The sitting having been suspended, an informal meeting of the Catholic deputies was held in one of the committee rooms, at which all the members of the Right, save three, assisted. In a brief address to his Parliamentary colleagues M. Schollaert referred to the circumstance of his resignation, impressed on them the necessity of thoroughly united action, promised his cordial support to the Ministry, and, amidst a storm of cheers, intimated that the Education Bill was not to be abandoned, but should form the first and

#### Chief Plank in the Catholic Platform.

With a unanimity as remarkable as it is rare, the Catholic Press throughout the entire country heartily approved of M. Schollaert's efforts to do long-delayed justice to the educational claims of the Catholic majority of the nation; with equal unanimity it has approved his action during the recent crisis and testified its appreciation of the eminent services he rendered to the country during the years of his Premiership. His retirement from office at this juncture occasions very sincere regret.

As regards the Education Bill, there is no intention on the part of the Catholic majority to abandon it—on the contrary, Educational Liberty and Educational Equality will be their battle-cry at the next legislative elections.

#### Wanganui

(From our own correspondent.)

August 4.

The Catholic euchre tournament, which took place in the Fire Brigade Hall on Wednesday evening, 2nd inst., was a decided success. The hall was packed, over 280 paying for admission, and 184 took part in the games. The evening passed off most enjoyably. Miss Mahoney and Mr. Johnston were the winners in the tournament, the former receiving a silver-mounted umbrella and the latter a fancy vest, donated by Messrs. Clapham and Co., tailors. The officials responsible for the tourney were: Messrs Gaffaney (chairman), Miles, Foley, McLachlan, Naughton, Keogh, and Kennedy.

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