

# RECORD AND REVIEW.

## THE BELGIAN ELECTION.

**T**HE general election which took place in Belgium on the 14th instant attracted unusual attention because of the remarkable extension of the suffrage provided by the constitutional amendment of last year. For more than sixty years previous to the election the exercise of the franchise was limited to about 130,000 of the population, but under the revised constitution this number was increased to 1,300,000, having under a plural system of voting about 1,900,000 votes. For not only is every adult male twenty-five years of age entitled to a vote, but an additional vote is given to every married man or widower thirty-five years of age and paying taxes of one dollar or more, and three votes to every man holding a graduate's degree or who has held a government office above a certain grade. The latter provisions were the result of a compromise due to the insistence of M. Frere-Orban, the old leader of the Liberals who championed the new electoral laws, that manhood suffrage alone would result in giving the constituencies to the Clericals and Socialists. It was held that under universal suffrage the increased artisan vote in the towns would be counterbalanced by that of the peasant proprietors and agricultural laborers, almost solidly Catholic, and that as the Clericals were already in the majority, the moderate Liberals and Radicals could only hope to win through plural and compulsory voting. Indeed, M. Frere-Orban doubted whether even then the Socialists would not be the gainers, and urged only a moderate extension of the franchise, but his advice was rejected and the suffrage extended to the dimensions stated. While the returns are yet incomplete, many second ballotings being necessary, it is clear that the Radicals are beaten on their own amendments, the gains made by the educational and office-holding qualifications being counterbalanced by the vote of the priests, and those made by the double vote for married men reduced by the fact that marriage is more general among the peasantry than among the artisans. The result is the practical disappearance of the moderate Liberals, an enormous falling off in the Radical vote, and the appearance of the Socialists, who previously had no seats in Parliament, as the chief opponents of the Clericals. That this is due in large part to the divisions in the Liberal party there is no doubt, though it is possible, of course, that the application of the principles of plural and compulsory voting may have had not a little to do with it, benefiting the Clericals and Socialists rather than the Liberals. The probability is, however, that the result fairly reflects the will of the Belgian people, the new electoral provisions applying to rich and poor alike, creating no privileged class, yet introducing into the electorate a great body of voters composed of mature and responsible men, which cannot fail in the end to exercise a sobering and restraining effect upon popular decisions. This is the right kind of universal suffrage, the kind which gives the weight of power to the older and more experienced, yet without unfairness, for all will in turn have the extra weight, and all are as equal with respect to voting as, probably, they ever desired or expected to be.