

Significance of Bye-Elections.

A RATHER extraordinary view of the results of the recent bye-elections in Canada is taken by the Chatham, N. B. *World* in its issue of the 20th inst. to the effect that the majorities as compared with the general election of 1900 showed an aggregate loss to the government of over 4,000 or an average loss of 640 for each constituency, and it is added that with a similar change throughout the Dominion at the next general election the government would have less than 50 members in the House of Commons.

There were altogether during the past two weeks 12 bye elections spread over different provinces and of these the government carried 9. In that proportion the representation of the whole Dominion would give the Liberals 160 members in the House of Commons at the next general election. Majorities are always relative things relating to the total vote polled. Local issues, the character of the candidate, his popularity, and so on, are the things which usually count at a bye-election. The government of the day is seldom on trial in a bye election in Canada. Public policy is not at stake. The policy of the government is fixed by the character of the government returned by the people at the general election, and unless the government majority is narrow the policy cannot be affected and is not brought in at these bye-elections. The port of St. John was exploited in the recent bye-election to an extent that would not be possible at a general election on account of the reflex action in Halifax. Majorities are sometimes cut down or increased by hundreds if the roads are heavy, or there is a bad storm on polling day. If the strength of one party lay in the county town and populated centres a storm would naturally keep many of the farmers at home and the

other side would lose in proportion. Majorities, therefore, as we have said, may vary greatly. Mr. Clarke Wallace had a majority at one time of over 4,000 but the next time he had only 820 which proved nothing at all, except that 800 was nearer the normal than the 4,000. This same constituency of West York elected a Liberal against Mr. Clarke Wallace's brother by a majority of 111. This was an apparent turnover of nearly 1000 votes, but it could not be used as an argument to show that the Conservative party in Ontario were going down at the rate of 1,000 votes in each constituency. That would be absurd.

What counts is the number of seats carried. That is what puts a government in power or puts it out. If a majority of 300 or 600 is only half what it was at a previous election it is still quite large enough to make the seat certain for the side that has that reduced majority and for the government to carry 9 seats out of 12 seems to us something for the Opposition to deplore as the result of that would be to make the next House of Commons consist of 160 Liberals and 54 Conservatives. We trust it will be more evenly divided than that.

The statement quoted above from our New Brunswick contemporary as to the majority being reduced by over 4,000 in the contested bye-elections must fairly be taken in connection with the fact that there were 12 bye-elections instead of 8 and the increase in the majorities of the 4 which went to the government by acclamation must be counted in favor of the government in which case there would be no reduction at all.

In contrast with the speculative comment on the results of the Canadian bye-elections let us glance at a summary of the British bye-elections held since Mr. Chamberlain announced his policy of pre-