

Our Standard of Political Morality

"Are we going to attract Immigration and Investment by our energy in developing our heritage, or are we going to repel them by pursuing our present paths protected by the twin devils of politics and patronage?"

ON September 14, 1916, the electorate will be asked to select representatives for the local legislature at Victoria. It is certain that a per centage will vote for the Conservative candidates and a per centage for the Liberal candidates without the slightest regard for policies or personalities. But this per centage is comparatively small, say 20 per cent. Conservative and 20 per cent. Liberal, or 40 per cent. in all of the total vote cast. The 60 per cent. balance constitutes the unknown factor which will decide the election. It consists of Conservatives and Liberals, is of a somewhat independent tendency, seldom attends ward meetings or other political gatherings except at election time, is apt to be caught by a gust of sentiment or a gale of prejudice, but, generally speaking, is not political, but practical. It is to this portion of the electorate the politicians are really appealing. Under ordinary circumstances, the political organisations can gauge their support fairly well. The parties fight their battle on well-defined ground. One or perhaps two issues, are to the fore, and it is not the past but the future to which appeal is made. In the present case, however, the issue is more personal than political. The Conservatives say they stand on their record. The Liberals interpret this record rather differently to the Conservatives, and urge that the good belongs to them and the evil to Mr. Bowser and his supporters.

LAND LEGISLATION

It will be probably be admitted by those who have closely followed the legislation of the last two years that much of it has been based on the Liberal demands which have been urged in the Liberal press for a considerable period. Undoubtedly the persistent attacks on the land policy of the Conservatives—said policy consisting of a limpet-like adherence to pre-emptions—was the direct inspiration of the Agricultural Credits Bill of 1915 and the Returned Soldiers Bill of 1916. The latter was amended several times before being passed, and Mr. Bowser promised Sir Rider Haggard to amend it still further at the next session, presuming he has the opportunity to do so.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

The Shipping Bill was essentially a Conservative piece of legislation. The Liberals tried hard to get it amended but Mr. Bowser thrust it through the house, against all advice. It was purely a political measure, in that it would give the appearance of fictitious prosperity to a specific industry, and the figures would sound well on the platform. The result of that legislation and its cost will not be apparent for two years or more. The Workmen's Compensation Act was specially designed to catch the working man's vote. It is an unlimited liability on the people of the province, is unbusiness-like in its apportionment of contributions, gives a great deal of scope to political patronage, rejects expert advice on a most complicated subject, and wrecks a considerable investment and business interests in the province. Basically, it is a good bill, but it could have been drawn up so that there would be natural co-operation

between the insurance companies and the government. There is no need, however, to repeat the criticisms already made of all the legislation passed at the last session. There are, of course, two points of view regarding most of it. It has several good features, and many bad ones, which might very well have been eliminated but for Mr. Bowser's desire to keep up appearances. But outside such legislation, the loan to the Pacific Great Eastern Railway should be sufficient to damn any government or party. It was the most flagrant misuse of power. Despite the fact that it was passed in order to attract the vote of the country through which the railway passes, it surely is plain to everyone that the government rushed it through and refused all investigation because it feared such investigation.

THE STRATHCONA PARK "INVESTMENT"

Strathcona Park is an excellent illustration of how grossly the administrative work of the government is mismanaged, and how incompetent Mr. Bowser himself is as attorney-general. In the last year or four years, the government has spent well over \$300,000 in providing trails and roads, in surveying hotel sites, and generally improving Strathcona Park so as to make it one of the great tourist and holiday resorts of the province. The Park lies round Buttle Lake, and at the time the property was acquired, the government undertook to buy the timber limits affected. These timber limits have changed hands several times but the government never completed its part of the deal. Apparently at one time Alvo von Alvensleben had an interest in this timber, and possibly the government believed it could write off its liability on the timber and acquire title by making it a credit entry against some part of Alvensleben's liability to the government. Be that as it may, it was plain that the company which owned the timber would have full right under the act to charge the government \$10 a tree for every tree cut down in the course of the improvements, and would also be able to prevent anyone using the Park as a camping ground, and thus making use of the very advantages the government advertised so widely in connection with the whole scheme.

NOT AN ASSET BUT A LIABILITY

This is now exactly what has happened. The owners of the timber having found last year that camps were dangerous on account of fires, refuse this year to allow campers within their timber limits, which stretch for 20 miles round Buttle Lake, and through which it is absolutely necessary to pass to such streams and mountain fastnesses as may exist behind the timber belt. The expenditure on the park has taken place almost entirely within this timber belt, so that the government has invested some \$340,000 in something it does not own and to which the public cannot have access, at least for camping or park purposes, until the limits are either purchased by the government or logged. The owners, it is understood, have offered the timber to the government at \$1.00 a thousand. As there are 400,000,000 feet of timber concerned, it means that the government will have to pay some \$400,000 to enable the