

THE LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE HANDBOOK, 1913.

THE Conservative party has issued a handbook which purports to review "The Borden Government's record of legislative measures and administrative progress in two years". From the appearance of the cover, the nature of the index, and the major portion of the contents, the reader would gain the impression that it was some new compendium on "Empire" or "Naval Defence". Indeed, "Index to treatise on naval defence" are the words descriptive of the only index which appears. To the compilers of the volume all else has seemed either too insignificant or unworthy of classification in detail.

"The free pathway across the seas is the first condition of the Empire's existence."—The Right Hon. R. L. Borden.

"The Prime Minister of the Dominion having inquired in what form any immediate aid that Canada might give would be most effective, we have no hesitation in answering after a prolonged consideration of all the circumstances, that it is desirable that such aid should include the provision of a certain number of the largest and strongest ships of war which science can build or money supply."—From the Admiralty Memorandum.

"The highest future for this Dominion lies within this Empire upon condition of equal status."—The Right Hon. R. L. Borden.

These quotations and "The Liberal-Conservative Handbook 1913" make up the cover of the volume, 112 pages of which, in addition to the index, are devoted exclusively to "The Naval Defence of Canada and the Empire."

All this display might be very fine in a party that had principles it was prepared to advocate and make a fight for. But when it is recalled that the Borden Administration has just met Parliament for its third session without mention of any policy of Naval Defence and without intention to do other than if possible, evade the whole question, it becomes both hypocritical and superfluous.

Significant Omissions

It is significant that the treatise nowhere quotes the words which appeared in the speech from the throne at the opening of the last session of Parliament alleging that the effective naval forces of the Empire needed strengthening without delay, and that it was the duty of Canada to afford reasonable and necessary aid for that purpose. Nor does it make mention of the declarations of the Prime Minister both prior and subsequent to the debate on this address that on account of the urgency of the need he would appeal to Parliament for aid, and if denied by Parliament the aid requested would appeal from Parliament to the people. Nor does this treatise quote Mr. Borden's words in the House of Commons on January 12th, 1910, as follows:

"It is idle to assure us that there will be no war. The war has already begun, the war of construction. The victory will be as decisive there as in actual battle. Does the dissolution of the Empire signify nothing to Canada and her people. . . . When the British Empire goes, the British North America Act goes also, and with it there departs every constitutional guarantee which it contains. All beyond is chaos and darkness."

(See Hansard, House of Commons debates, Jan. 12th, 1910, 1799-1815-1818.)

Significant too, is the circumstance that it omits all reference to Mr. Borden's remarkable utterances in Parliament on December 5th, 1912 at the time of introducing the Naval Aid Bill, in which he characterized the existing situation as follows:

"To-day while the clouds are heavy and we hear the booming of the distant thunder and see the lightning flashes above the horizon, we cannot and we will not wait and deliberate until any impending storm shall have burst upon us in fury and with disaster."

(See Hansard, House of Commons debates: Dec. 5th, 1912, pps. 714-715.)

It did not take the compass of a single year to reveal the folly of this kind of excessive jingoism, and with it the futility of the policy of expediency which it was intended to support. It may help to play the game of a group of Jingo-Imperialists in the Old World and some of their satelittes in the New, for the Tory party to devote the greater portion of its oratory and literature to alarmist generalizations on the subject of Empire and Naval warfare, but something other than the use of these terms as a cloak for unpatriotic and paralyzing alliances is needed if the Conservative party in Canada is not to wholly lose the respect of its own following in the Dominion, and avoid the contempt of Britishers in all parts of the world.

Nature of Contents

Twenty-four pages of the handbook are devoted to a laboured apology for "The introduction of the closure," and twenty pages to the "Liberal Party and Reciprocity." It is only near the close of the volume that any attempt is made to give the Record of "Legislative measures and Administrative Progress." It would perhaps have been better for the reputation of the Tory party in the country if this last had never been attempted, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." Up to the present the public has cherished a hope that something worthy of record was being achieved. Here is the last word the Government is capable of giving on its own behalf, the highest note of its own praise. Critically analyzed the record is a confession of sterility in legislation and of routine procedure in administration at a greatly enhanced cost to the country. Shorn of mention of measures introduced but not carried in parliament, and of measures which were but the carrying on of policies and enactments of the Laurier Administration, the so called "record" all but wholly disappears.

The two years' achievements are summarized at the conclusion of the volume. Elsewhere in the present issue of the *Liberal Monthly* the summary is republished exactly as set forth at pages 256 and 257 of the Handbook. That the reader may not be misled by misstatement, or lack of exact information, the truth in respect of the several items as given, is set forth in italicized comment. Remembering that the record contains nothing of the sins of omission or commission which remain an unwritten chapter, so far as the handbook is concerned, but is a display of the Government's virtues and achievements as framed up by the administration itself, the Canadian electors, may well ask themselves the question, has the Borden Government, according to its own showing, done aught to merit the approbation of the Canadian public in the use made of the opportunities its position affords, or aught to entitle it to a continuance of their confidence?