

"BOOTS AND POLITICS."

CANADIANS generally were given an unpleasant jolt early in December when cabled despatches to several Canadian newspapers showed that no less careful an authority than the London *Times* had called in question the quality of the boots supplied to the first Canadian Expeditionary Force, still at Salisbury Plains. The cabled reports of the article in *The Times*, either censored or carefully prepared, gave but a faint idea of the text of the original, which appeared in *The Times* of December 2, under the sub-heading "Boots and Politics". Following is the article, which formed part of a lengthy report from the Special Correspondent of *The Times* at Salisbury Plains:

"Boots and Politics"

The persistent wet and slush are hard, however, on boots, and it is an unfortunate fact that boots do not seem to have been the strong point in the equipment of the Canadian troops. One hears hard thing said of the Canadian contractors who furnished the boots to the Field Force, and it is perhaps as well that the troops did not have to go at once to the front with the footwear in which they came over. Nor is it the only detail, as the innocent visitor gathers, in which "politics"—the universal scapegoat—prevented the gathering and dispatch of the force from being altogether ideal. But whatever shortcomings of equipment or of organization there may have been are all being rapidly remedied, and the fact that it gives time to remedy them makes the officers, at least, acquiesce the more willingly to the period of enforced waiting.

An Officer's Complaint.

Since the first news through *The Times*, similar complaints have been made public, mainly through private letters of members of the Canadian forces at Salisbury Plains, which have been published in various papers throughout Canada. A fair sample of these letters was recently published in *The Ottawa Journal* (Conservative), from which the following extract is taken:

"I would ask you to appeal to the Government contractors with a view to touching their sense of honor. It seems to me that all they care about is to produce some kind of article that has appearance. They evidently do not stop to consider that these sons of Canada are roughing it for the specific purpose of fighting and sacrificing their all in order to defend these same contractors' factories, and their personal liberties. The principal trouble has been in boots, and it is not fair to the soldiers to allow these contractors to reap a harvest at his expense. An officer is in a position to purchase his own equipment, but the man behind the gun must take what he is served out with. Of course there have been some good boots issued, which have been manufactured by a certain two firms, but the others are **absolutely unserviceable after a few days wear.**"

Investigation Ordered.

An investigation was ordered by the Government shortly after the charge made by the London *Times* became known. The Minister of Militia appointed an investigating committee consisting of Lt.-Col. Hallack, Assistant Director of Equipment, Ottawa, Edward Stephens of Ottawa and D. Sinclair of Barrie. Mr. Sinclair being unable to act he was replaced by T. O. Galipeau of Montreal. According to statements made by Conservative newspapers such as the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Winnipeg Telegram*, a thorough enquiry was ordered, and it was announced that boxes of boots, of which the quality was suspected of being inferior, had been returned to the Militia Department, with statements giving details of their issue and the wear to which they have been subjected.

Who Is Responsible?

The result of the investigation by the committee appointed by the Minister of Militia will be awaited with interest, especially in view of the fact that every pair of shoes bought by the Militia Department and issued to the soldiers is supposed to have passed rigid Government inspection. Under the system of inspection which the public has been led to believe was instituted, not all of the blame for goods not up to contract specifications can be laid at the doors of the manufacturers. There is an even greater responsibility on the Government officials who accepted such goods, and the Government which allowed them to do it.

The report of the committee appointed by the Minister of Militia was presented to the Militia Department on January 11, according to a statement in the *Montreal Gazette* of January 12, which explained that the report will go to Major General Hughes and may not be made public for some time. Details of the report, it was intimated, are not available, but the *Gazette* says:

"It is understood unofficially, however, that the report finds that many of the boots supplied to the men were far too light to stand the wear to which they were subjected. In some cases, too, it is understood that the quality of work was found to be not of the best, but to have been to some extent excused by the fact that the contractors were called upon to do their work in a hurry."

Whatever may be the finding of the committee and whatever the result of its report, the public generally will feel that it has not been altogether satisfactory. No investigation into any matter of public concern can be satisfactory to the public unless it is an open investigation and free to the light of day.

The latest incident in this unfortunate and humiliating affair is the announcement from London on January 13, conveyed in a special cable to the *Ottawa Citizen* that "The Canadian troops here are to discard their Canadian made boots which have been declared too light and not waterproof. The troops are to be fitted with British ammunition boots."