

Mr. HUGHES. I rise just to make a point here which I think has been overlooked. I am well pleased to see the Militia Department investigated, and I am satisfied that in a very short time we shall find out that the true cause of this difficulty is not in the storage department; that it is not alone—I do not say that it is not at all—in the executive department, but that it lies rather in the management of the permanent corps, and the connection which exists between the permanent corps and the active force. However, that I shall speak about later on. A number of the speakers addressing the House this afternoon and evening, referred to the stores here across the canal basin. I think it will be found that the criticism in the report of the Major-General does not refer to the issue from the stores from the headquarters branch here. The boots referred to, I believe, were procured outside. One pair was found in Québec, which had not been supplied through the regular contracting quarter. The man had gone and purchased the boots from the contractor himself. The quality of the clothing that is supplied differs from that of a few years ago. At that time the trousers were often not what they ought to be, but the quality of the uniform supplied at the present time is superior, and I am satisfied that if any member of the House would take an hour or two to examine the stores, he would find that the uniforms are in every respect of very good quality. The saddlery and other material with which fault was found, was also, I believe, found at other points, some at Québec and some elsewhere. I would also point out another fact. Let the Government and the inspecting officers be as faithful and as careful as men can be, yet mistakes will arise. We all remember how a very few years ago—I do not remember whether the Major-General was in the force at that time or not—when the British troops were fighting in Egypt, they discovered that the bayonets—not merely the accoutrements, but the bayonets—given to the soldiers for active service, were made of pot metal. They discovered this when they came to the charge, when they found that the cuticle of the aborigines was so thick that the bayonets doubled up, leaving the British soldiers at the mercy of the negroes. We remember also, how in the Crimean war any number of mistakes were made and any number of swindles perpetrated in connection with the contracting. We remember also, that in Egypt the British soldiers found their Martini bullets and cartridges absolutely useless. They stuck in the rifles and could not be extracted, and thus the rifles were rendered useless, again placing the British soldier at the mercy of the enemy. I state this, not in defence of the department, for, as I say, I am pleased to have that department investigated, but merely to show that, however careful the officers may be, mistakes will arise.

Mr. PATTERSON (Huron).

Mr. SUTHERLAND. I do not intend to trouble myself with the ancient history with which the late Minister of Militia has dealt. But I am pleased with the remarks of the present Minister, and if I say a few words, it is simply with the desire that the expressions made use of by the Minister shall not be regarded simply as empty words, only to be recorded in the "Hansard." He has stated that it would be a calamity to the Dominion of Canada if the Militia Department were conducted on a political basis. For my part, as a member of the force, I must say that I fear that to some extent in the past we have had that calamity in this country. However that may be, the new Minister has promised us that this shall not be the case in the future and that he will make many changes in relation to the force. I will say to my hon. friend, the ex-Minister of Militia, who spoke so warmly on the question of the equipment to-night, that he must not forget, notwithstanding the strong protest he has made, that he has had representations made by the highest officers in the militia throughout the country with regard to the equipment and with regard to the quality of some of the stores furnished to the men. He has had it from the men and from the officers of almost every battalion throughout the country. He has heard it from members of this House, themselves members of the militia force. He seems to have a very short memory with regard to some of these things. The late hon. member for Frontenac, the Hon. Mr. Kirkpatrick, pointed out session after session to the hon. Minister the deficiency in the matter of equipment, and made suggestions which, to his mind, and, I think, to the mind of many other members of the militia force in this House, were in the direction of improvement. The hon. gentleman has told us that he has appealed to the House from time to time for an increased vote for the purpose of giving a more efficient equipment to the volunteers. I have been a member of this House for a good many years. I have stood in my place and urged for a great many sessions the desirability of improving the equipment, and from both sides the Minister has been urged, if his excuse was a good one that he had not money enough to make the small improvement desired, to ask for the necessary money and he would be supported. But, Sir, we have not been able to get the Minister at the head of the department to take enough interest in the representations made, not only by members of this House, but by the leading officers in the different divisions, in favour of better equipment. I desire, Sir, to impress this on the hon. Minister. If he will look at the reports he will see that but little importance has been attached to this matter. We find that, as a rule, the officers of the department here have been courteous and active and energetic, and have shown every desire to do their duty to the best of their ability. I have found, so far as my experience goes, that the militia