

THE BOOT SCANDAL.

THE public scandal in connection with the boots supplied to Canadian soldiers developed to such an extent during the month previous to the opening of Parliament that it was the subject of several public utterances on the part of the Minister of Militia and announcements from the Militia department were eagerly sought and discussed by newspapers on both sides of politics.

The outstanding facts were the admissions by Major General Hughes that the boots had not been satisfactory and his announcements that he would make a full investigation and take steps to punish the parties responsible; also the news from England that the Canadian troops had been ordered to discard their Canadian made boots, which have been replaced by British made service boots.

Canadian Boots Discarded.

On January 14, cables from London to several Canadian papers announced that the Canadians at Salisbury Plains were to discard their Canadian made boots which "had been declared too light and not waterproof." On the following day the *Montreal Gazette* published an announcement from the Militia department that the new boots to be made in Canada, presumably to fill the further requirements of the troops still in Canada, "will combine the best points of the French and British service patterns" and that a special sub-committee had been appointed to investigate the question in detail, with Mr. George Slater of Montreal as technical adviser. On January 21, Ottawa press despatches announced that orders for 150,000 pairs of the new model were to be placed at once.

Major General Hughes' Admissions.

It was at Calgary, Alta., on January 20, addressing a public meeting after his inspection of the troops at that point, that Major General, Hon. Sam Hughes made his first public admission regarding the boots. He was reported by the Calgary papers as having said:

"I am sorry to say that some of the last issue of boots were not as good as they might have been. Leave it to us that we will get after the fellows who did not do their duty."

At Vancouver, on January 22, in an address before the Canadian Club, the Minister of Militia was reported as saying that "most of the government contractors were square with the government, but there were some who wanted 150% profit, though the number was small, and if martial law ever gave him the power he would be pleased to shoot such contractors, who, he said, were a greater enemy to the soldier than were a hundred Germans."

Returned to Ottawa, the Minister of Militia spoke again of the samples of bad boots he had brought back with him and stated that he had immediately given orders to the legal head of his department to take action against the proper persons.

Contractors Blame Government.

In all the statements coming from the Minister of Militia or from the officers of his department, it was made to appear that the contractors alone were at fault. To this the manufacturers generally have taken decided objection and declare that the chief

fault lies with the Government in ordering boots on specifications that were faulty.

Thus, the *Shoe and Leather Journal*, in an article in its January number referred to by Sir Wilfrid Laurier in the Commons, declared that "the specifications are not generally thought to be those for the 'fighting shoe', and in the same issue published a long interview with W. V. Matthews of Ames, Holden, McCready, Limited, of Montreal, defending the manufacturers and pointing out the unfitness of the shoes and the great difference in the weight of the Canadian shoe compared with British army boots. Later on, on February 1, the *Montreal Star* (Conservative) said that "for any fault in Canadian military boots local shoe manufacturers place the blame on the specifications issued by the Government and not on the workmanship."

Knew Boots were Unsuitable.

Ames, Holden, McCready, Limited, were quoted as saying that they knew the shoe worn by the first Canadian contingent was entirely different from that worn by the British army. Corbeil, Limited, who had not made any of the army shoes, was quoted as saying that the shoes made in Canada were not suitable for the purpose of the War, but this was not the fault of the manufacturers who followed specifications. Alf. Lambert, Inc., was quoted as saying "I do know this, that the shoe specified was entirely too light for men on active service." Theo. Galipeau, of the firm of Dufresne and Galipeau, one of the members of the committee appointed by the government to investigate the complaints regarding the boots, was quoted as saying that "undoubtedly the boots supplied to the first contingent were too light." Joseph Daoust of Daoust, Lalonde & Co., declared that the leather specified was altogether too light, and added, "They were all very well for riding, or for parading on the Champ de Mars, but they were not fit for anything else."

"A Criminal Outrage," says Star.

In the same issue, the *Montreal Star* treated the matter editorially and called upon the government for a thorough investigation. After making allowance for the suddenness of the demand and the consequent strain on Government departments in equipping the troops, the *Star* proceeds:

"But some one, in this case of the shoes, has been guilty, apparently, of a blunder so fatal as to constitute a crime; and Parliament should be 'fearless and fair' in forcing a full and searching enquiry into the whole business. There ought to have been boot experts somewhere along the line, from Government to contractor, who would know what the British army boot was like—and why. They ought to have known that it would have been little short of murder to send our lads into the trenches for a winter campaign in Flanders with footwear that 'soaked up the water like blotting paper.' Fortunately the vigilance of the British Government prevented this supreme catastrophe; but how many deaths on Salisbury Plain from meningitis and pneumonia have been due to this terrifying and amazing foot fiasco?"