

PLAIN SAM HUGHES, PLUS K.C.B.

A More or Less Random Misappreciation of the Minister of Militia

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

FOUR years ago it was so easy to say just who was meant when you tried to give an opinion about a certain violent, talkative and aggressive person who sat in the House of Commons for Victoria and Haliburton. The answer was—Sam Hughes. Now—let's be quite sure we have the thing



right—that same blustering, dynamic person is Major-General the Hon. Sir Sam Hughes, K.C.B., Minister of Militia and Defence. But leave it to the average man that wants to talk about him if he won't still call him Sam Hughes; because that's what he really is, and what he would still be if he had a yard of decorative prefixes and affixes to his name. The original Sam is still there. Does he scorn the ornaments? Not likely. If he had twice as many he would be willing to take as many more, wear every one of them on his clothes if possible, and insist on being regarded as a man who reckons he has earned every decoration he

has, and before he quits storming his way through life, may happen to get more of them.

This peculiar capacity of the Minister of Militia for "more to follow" was tersely expressed by him in what the Standard of Empire calls a picturesque phrase which he let off in London. Referring to what the Empire has yet to do in this war he said, "We have only just begun to roll up our sleeves." In a London despatch printed in our daily papers, "Chester" said a few days ago:

"His directness, optimism and forthrightness have won him many friends and much public appreciation. London likes him."

Whatever "forthrightness" may or may not mean as applied to Sam Hughes, there is no doubt about the optimism and the rolling up the sleeves. Sir Sam is a sleeves-up character. Ergo, he usually has nothing up his sleeve. He was never born to be a humble, retiring person. Sir Sam was cut out for the stage of action. He was meant to be a knocker and to get knocks; to be a talker and to get talked about; to do things and be ready to hand over robust opinions why he did them or what the devil he meant by it.

So there is no need to apply the soft pedal to this man. He is as full of faults as an egg is of yolk. He knows most of them; admits many; knows that even his friends say he is sometimes bumptious, self-confident, inclined to bull-in-the-china-shop methods, not overly modest and not always tremendously discreet. What of it? Sam was born that way. So were his brothers and his cousins and his aunts. It's in the Hughes blood. They must always be up and doing. They recognize rules often to break them. And of the whole quartette of brothers, beginning with James L., the Minister of Militia is the best rule-smasher of the family.

Bear this in mind, when trying to estimate Sam Hughes. He is a March wind, and the more hats he blows off and poles he blows down the better he likes it. It is never necessary to understand him well enough to explain him. Sam Hughes doesn't want to be explained. He doesn't care particularly for anybody to vindicate him. He doesn't mind what stories are told or invented about him. Some of them are true; others are legendary. Which is which concerns nobody. If half the stories bandied about Sam Hughes since he started to organize the first C. E. F. were published as truth, he would have been out of the Cabinet by this time instead of being honoured by the King with a K.C.B., and written about in despatches as though he were some new kind of Canadian public character intended to help save the Empire.

SAM HUGHES was only well into long trousers when he began to be the original of yarns. He was born on a farm; so was his brother Jim, for nearly forty years Inspector of Schools in Toronto. So was his brother John, the elder, who not long ago wanted the worst way to be allowed to go to the front, but Sam had to refuse him because he was far over age. His father was a school-teacher who owned a farm down in Durham County, Ont. At the age of fourteen he was being taught school lessons by his brother James at Frankford, Hastings County. At the age of fourteen and a half he enlisted at Bowmanville. That was the time of the first Fenian Raid in 1866. After the Raid was over he

went to Toronto and attended the Model School where his brother James was teacher. He graduated from the Normal School, and with a first-class certificate, went teaching down at Belleville, where he became a friend of Mackenzie Bowell, then a pretty old man and still living. His next school was in Lifford. Did he wallop any of the bad lads? Well, likely. But he never needed to wear a strap on his sleeve. Sam was able to scare a good-sized rebel out of his boots by just setting his jaw and looking at him. Such gusto had never been known in a teacher in those parts. So it was in the Jarvis Street Collegiate where Sam Hughes taught next and where he plugged up an honour course in Toronto University.

All this while he was soldiering. He didn't enlist in the Fenian Raid at the age of fourteen and a half to forget it. He was an officer in the old 45th Regiment for many years when his brother John was a senior. When John took the colonelcy of the 46th Sam took the colonelcy of the 45th. We don't read that as a lad he was given to playing with tin sol-



The way Major-General Sam Hughes felt after he had seen the first C.E.F. off for England down in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

diers. But he always had in his mind the possibility of war. Fighting was in the Hughes blood. It was part of the sporting nature. It came out first in lacrosse. Both Sam and Jim were two of the greatest lacrosse players ever known in Canada. Sam founded the Millbrook lacrosse team. Jim organized lacrosse in the Model School at Toronto. They both played on the crack Toronto team that used to mop the earth with the Shamrocks. Sam had the knack of catching a ball coming his direction and sending it along without stopping it. General Otter remembers those old lacrosse struggles, for he used to play on the same team with both the Hughes boys. And if Sam Hughes to-day were asked which he would rather cut out of his career, lacrosse or school-teaching—he would hardly say lacrosse. That swift, slugging, open-handed game suited him.

Pedagogy with him was only a stepping-stone—to just what, he hardly knew. When he quit teaching and got hold of the Lindsay Warder he had no intention of becoming a great editor. He was an Orangeman and a Tory; and to have a paper of his own gave him a good opportunity of slugging something. Which he did.

Once in those earlier days the editor lambasted a certain class of people who didn't happen to think the same as Orangemen. The article made these people very warm. One market day it was decided to pick out the biggest pugilist in the community to give the editor a trimming. It so happened, however, that in his former days Sam Hughes had done some

boxing; a good deal with one Charlie Kelly a baritone singer that kept a barber shop in Bowmanville, and whom one evening with the gloves on Sam man aged to lam through the front window of the shop into the street. But, of course, the big Hibernian knew nothing about that. When the crowd began to collect at the market to see the fun, the Irishman slambanged into the Warder Office and said a few things impromptu to the editor, who told him to move out. The move was not made quick enough to suit Sam, who landed one on the jaw, knocking him down, another when he got up, and a third that sent him on to the sidewalk. After which the editor invited all and sundry to come on—but none of them came.

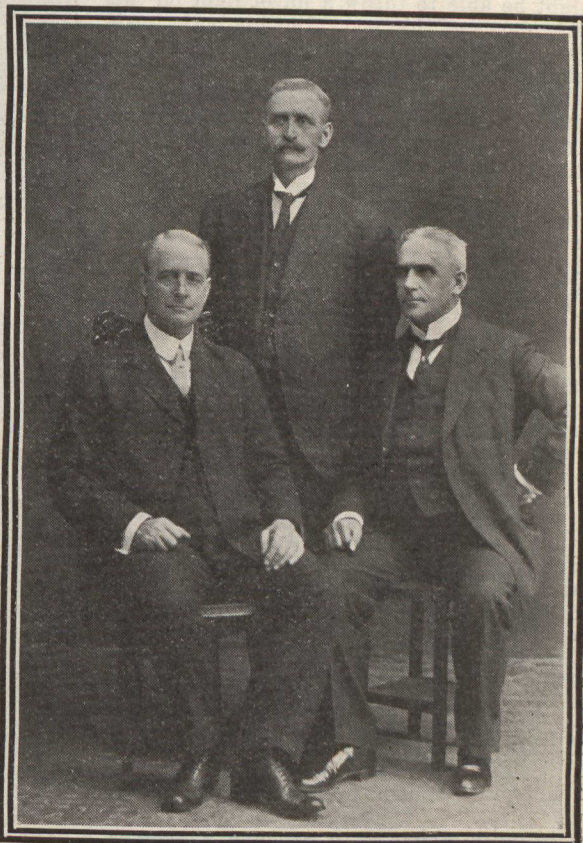
So runs the story; which is not apocryphal either. And, of course, there are others that sound a little different.

HOWEVER, it was not long till Sam Hughes got into a field where there was more fighting to be done than in the editor's chair. In 1891 he made his first attempt to enter the House of Commons. He was defeated by John Barron, now Judge Barron, of Stratford. The very next year he turned the tables. He was re-elected in 1896 when Laurier came into power, and has never been defeated since. In his four years of Opposition he was always sparing in the House; not always taken seriously; by a great many Liberals regarded as a joke. When he got on the Government side he was rather more of a soldier than a politician. War was always with him. In 1897 he was acting Brigade-Major of Military District No. 3. And it was then only two years from the Boer War, in which Sam Hughes first became known as a real character in a more adventurous field than pedagogy, lacrosse or politics. Did he go like anybody else? Not likely. Sam Hughes, Colonel, went to South Africa convinced that Canadians had something to do in that war bigger than anything ever done by a colony in any Empire struggle.

There are almost as many contrary opinions about Sam Hughes' part in the Boer War as there are about who started the present one. Some people who thought Sam was an egotist before he went down there, thought he was a real I-Amist afterwards. The fact of the matter is Sam Hughes wasn't loafing a bit, and although he was working hard at war in several capacities he found time to talk. He poured out his criticisms of things in particular in letters home to friends, some of whom published them; result—Hughes came in for all sorts of criticism at home for talking about himself.

Well, discretion was never the better part of valour with the Hughes family. Lord Milner sent Hughes as assistant to Col. Wynter on the transports to the Modder. Sam facilitated the movement of supplies. The old custom was to have a mixture of goods for various posts in one car; time wasted digging them out. Hughes introduced the post-office or freight-

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Sir Sam Hughes on the right—with his two brothers, Col. John in the middle, and Jas. L. Hughes, LL.D., taken in 1912.