

be allowed to tender on work which they hear is to be done by the government. We have them informed officially that the tenders have been let and therefore that they are out of the field, and that it is of no use their tendering. The Speaker is written to on this matter by a firm wanting to tender, and he is misled and writes informing them that the contract has been awarded. It is only when a question is asked of the Prime Minister—and he apparently is the only innocent man in the whole government, innocent to the extent that he knows nothing about these enormous contracts—that he learns there has been any correspondence or any tender or any contract to be agreed upon. The Prime Minister answers that no tender has been let. He leaves the impression on this House that there has been no negotiation for such a contract, that no tenders have been asked for and that the matter is simply one that has been discussed by the members of the government. We find that the Prime Minister's answer is left out of 'Hansard,' a most extraordinary thing. The whole proceedings, one step after another in this transaction is so extraordinary that I think the country will require an explanation which will be so full that there can be no suspicion, as suspicion must now rest upon this transaction and on somebody in connection with it. We even find, to cap the whole climax, a most extraordinary error in the estimates. We find that the estimates as printed and put before us show that a sum of \$100,000 was voted last year. We have from the Finance Minister a very simple and reasonable explanation that the figures have been transposed and if this had been only one case it would have been accepted without question or any hesitation, but the additions show \$733,000 which necessitates the inclusion of that \$100,000 in the column of the estimates of last year. The Finance Minister's explanation of that may be accepted, that it is added up after the figures are printed. Now even that explanation would be accepted, but let us turn from that to the summary showing the total expenditure published by the Finance Department, and here we find the total is \$62,179,344 and it requires that \$100,000 which is in error put into the estimates of last year, to make those figures. It cannot be possible that the Finance Minister has put forth to this House and this country financial statements that simply on the first blush, the first time attention is called to them, show an error of \$100,000 in the grand total. If that is the case I say that the figures which we have submitted here are not to be taken by this House or the country as being correct in any shape or way, because if the Finance Minister will issue his financial statement showing on the face of it an error of \$100,000 in the capital addition I say that the figures we

have here are not to be relied upon. It is either gross carelessness on the part of the men who prepared the figures or this is done for some other purpose. When we find an error of this amount there is something radically wrong in the manner in which these accounts are kept and printed.

Mr. FIELDING. I think when you have regard to the large number of items in the estimates, the marvel is not that once in a while some error occurs but that errors are so few, and I think I may say in justice to the officers of the department, many of whom have been there a great many years, that they are in every case capable, painstaking and careful officers. But an error will once in a while happen. I think it is unfortunate that this has occurred. I have sent for my officers and I have now the original item as it came from the Department of the Interior and I find in that original item there is no sum placed in the column for 1904-5; the sum of \$100,000 is placed in the column of 1905-6 and it is also carried into the next column to the right, showing it to be an increase. Therefore the error in the estimates was not made in the Department of the Interior and I must at once relieve the Department of the Interior from that charge and say that the error occurred in the Finance Department, or rather it occurred in the Printing Bureau, in the printing of the estimates, but in the proof reading it should have been the business of the officers of the Finance Department to discover it. I say most positively that so far as the Department of the Interior is concerned, they sent the item over in proper form.

Mr. OSLER. Is there no check made at all on the correctness of the figures in the summary that is given to us?

Mr. FIELDING. Yes. As to the effect of this error upon the other figures, that will take more time to look into, and I will look into it. But there is a check on every column and every item of figures, all the checks which ordinary care can apply. In this instance a mistake has occurred, notwithstanding.

Mr. OSLER. And the same in the summary as well?

Mr. FIELDING. I will have to look into this to see the effect on the other figures. But my chief object in rising is to place on the table for inspection the original item of the Department of the Interior, which shows there is no fault on their part in sending over the estimate.

Mr. INGRAM. The right hon. gentleman referred to some Bills passed this session dealing with public contracts. I want to point out that section 2 of these Bills introduced the present session, which makes the law different from what it was previously, reads as follows: