

out the country, and this is a matter in which we could have had very considerable competition. Therefore, I say that if the matter is to be consummated, wide publicity should be given to it and I rather think that the government will not require to expend very much money now to give publicity to it because I think it will be heard of from ocean to ocean through the information which will go forth from this discussion, but at any rate, if they do propose to enter into a contract it would be well that all fence companies should have an opportunity of tendering. I think I have put myself right in regard to the seeming blunder that I fell into yesterday. I thought I had made a mistake. I at once corrected myself so that I would not mislead the House, but I found in the correction I made, I unwittingly fell into another blunder. I do not hold myself responsible for that second blunder; I hold the hon. Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) responsible for that because he should have known that his estimates were incorrect. Somebody was responsible for it. I would not like to say that the hon. Minister of Finance was responsible for it, but it is a matter of finance and either he or the officers of his department certainly should have scanned these estimates thoroughly before they were laid before the House.

Mr. FIELDING. I could not very well have scanned these estimates, because I was 3,000 miles away. That, however, makes no difference; I am responsible for my department and I do not want the hon. gentleman (Mr. Henderson) to think anything else. I find the statement which my hon. friend made, and which I myself made a few moments before, that the estimate for this work came in this session, was correct, and that the figures that conveyed to my hon. friend the impression that there was a sum asked for last session are not correct. The estimates are correct in regard to the sum that they ask for, but in the comparative column, there is an error. I did not observe it until my hon. friend spoke. I sent for my official at once and he points out that these figures which were intended to appear in two columns had been moved over to the left. The sum of \$100,000 appears in the appropriation column for 1905-6. So far correct. Then it should have appeared in the right hand column under the head of 'increase.' I am not prepared to say whose fault it is, but in the printing of this item, instead of appearing in the column for the appropriation for 1905-6 and in the column of increase, it appeared in the appropriation column and in the comparative column of votes last year. This comparison should be correct and I want to explain how the error occurred. When my hon. friend said yesterday that there was an estimate proposed I understood that he spoke of the estimate for the coming year, because I had no recollection of the previous year. The moment he drew attention to-day to the com-

Mr. HENDERSON.

parison, I sent for my official and the explanation he gives is that these two items of \$100,000 each should be moved over to the right. They are misleading, so far as the comparison with last year is concerned, and I can only express my regret that they have appeared in this way. They should not appear.

Mr. TAYLOR. And when the estimates for this year would come up, the Minister of Finance would say that this was a revote.

Mr. FIELDING. Certainly it has that appearance and to that extent it is misleading.

Hon. GEO. E. FOSTER. That removes one of the difficulties out of the road, and I would not take it upon myself to say that the fact of the figures being in the wrong column was due to malice prepense. Such a mistake is apt to occur either through a little carelessness in such a mass of estimates on the part of the clerk, or perhaps in the printing office. I would not look upon that as a serious crime, but that very fact gives an added importance to the question we are discussing. The ex-Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton) dominated that department—whether he has dominated outside of that department or not—for a number of years. Has any one the shadow of a doubt that the minister having taken all the initial steps necessary to award the contract, that contract would have been absolutely awarded and would have been in effect to-day, had that minister been in Ottawa? The fact that the contract was not awarded is due to the accidental circumstance that the minister was obliged to be absent, and that for some reason there was delay in either waiting for the minister or for the advent of a new minister. This is what has occurred so far as we can judge. A project was on hand to build a line of costly wire fence. That project had its inception in the Department of the Interior, and without any appropriation being asked for or obtained from this parliament, the responsible minister of the department decided that the work should go on; work for which there was not a dollar of money voted. He decided that 100 miles of fencing should be built immediately and that another 100 miles should be built after the first 100 miles had been finished or under way. The minister sitting in his department, without any reference to his colleagues, without any authorization of council, without any vote having been given by this parliament, presumed upon himself to award a contract, and he virtually did award this contract for the erection of 100 miles of wire fencing at an expenditure of \$550 per mile. If 200 miles of fencing had been erected as was the intention it would have meant an expenditure of a good deal over \$110,000 including the gates, &c. Has it been the practice heretofore, that each minister of himself and of his own motion, can without reference to or authorization by council, plunge this