

MAGAZINE RIFLE. Hansard

HC Deb 03 February 1891 vol 349 cc1631-84 [1631](#)

§^{*} (4.10.)MR. MARJORIBANKS (Berwickshire) rose to call attention to the new Magazine Rifle; and to move— For the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into its merits and all the circumstances attending its adoption. The right hon. Gentleman said: I am afraid I shall be obliged to make a large demand on the patience and indulgence of the House in bringing this subject forward. I am bound to confess that the nearer I approach the task I have undertaken the more difficult, it appears to me, because, while I cannot pretend to be an expert in mechanics and ballistics, I have undertaken to explain to the House the details of a most complicated and ingenious machine, in whose very complexity and intricacy some of its chief defects are to be found. I am still further placed in a difficulty, because Mr. Speaker has informed me that I should not be in order in bringing a rifle into the House, by means of which I might have given an object lesson to the House in regard to the many points of the rifle. Neither have I the power to exhibit drawings to House. This is not the only difficulty of the position, because I find that the House is absolutely wanting in any official knowledge of this weapon. The Report of the Small Arms Committee, who chose the weapon, has been refused to us. There is no Report whatever with regard to the 15,000 rifles which, we are told, were placed in the bands of the troops during 1890. I am informed that something like 50 [1632](#) per cent. of these rifles have been returned to the armoury for repair, and I hear on the best authority that in the case of one single regiment 280 bolt-heads failed, and 400 mainsprings broke down in the weapons served out. The only Report before the House is the Report of a trial made of 350 rifles which were issued to various regiments and ships' companies in the year 1888. With regard to my own attitude, I wish to say that I am not the mouthpiece of any inventor. I come to the subject with an entirely open mind. My desire is, as I believe it is the desire of the Secretary for War and every official, that the country shall have the best possible weapon at the smallest possible cost. It has been said it is unfortunate that I, as a Party Whip, should have been called to bring forward this Motion, but I can assure the House that I have left the question of Party altogether out of sight. I have taken no advantage of my official position, and I think hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite will admit that I am hardly likely, from my position, and the Party to which I belong, to be the mouthpiece of the Times in the matter. The hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hanbury) opposes my request for an inquiry on the ground that it would weaken the responsibility of the officials of the War Office. Although the hon. Member appears to agree with me [Mr. HANBURY assented] in the view I take of this weapon, and with regard to the way in which it has been introduced, the hon. Member appears to think that the proper course would have been to ask for a vote of censure on the War Office; but that vote of censure is contained in the Report of the Commission presided over by the noble Lord the Member for Rossendale (the Marquess of Hartington). It seems to me that the best course the House can take is to order a review of the circumstances attending the adoption of this weapon. I shall have to go briefly into the details of the weapon, taking the barrel and ammunition, the body, the bolt, and magazine in order. The calibre of the barrel is .303. The rifling is seven groove, with the twist to the left on a modified Metford system. There is one turn for every ten inches, or three turns in all. The ammunition provided consists of a [1633](#) solid drawn brass cartridge, with a compressed pellet of black powder of 71½

grains, and a composite bullet weighing 215 grains. I admit one great advantage has been gained, namely, a weapon in which there is practically no recoil. The recoil in this weapon is only 7 lb., while in the Martini-Henry it is 45 lb. Further, a comparatively flat or low trajectory is obtained; but these advantages might have been attained without any change whatever in the breech mechanism. A mere change in the barrel of the Martini-Henry would have given them. A very small bore has been adopted; what are its disadvantages? In the first place, it necessitates a composite bullet. A lead bullet cannot be used. The composite bullet is exceedingly expensive to make, and the cost of ammunition will be greatly increased. I believe that the smallest bore in which it is possible to use a simple lead bullet is .320, but I should not advise even so small a bore as this, believing .360 or .380 to be an amply sufficient reduction in bore for all military purposes. Secondly, there is a considerable loss of accuracy, the small, long, light bullet of the Lee-Enfield is very susceptible to lateral deviation from the influence of wind. I should like to know what any distinguished small-bore shot, were it Sir Henry Halford himself, would say if he were asked to use a .303 in the competition for the Elcho Shield. And, thirdly, there is a great diminution of striking power. Allusion to this will be repeatedly found in the Report of the trial of rifles in 1888. I do not believe there is an owner of a deer forest in Scotland who would allow a friend to go out to shoot deer with a rifle of this exceedingly small bore. The greatest amount of striking power is obtained in the Express rifle, in which is used a lead bullet with, a hole in the top—a device, of course, impossible to adopt for a military arm—which expands in the animal struck, and prevents the bullet from passing through. The body of the rifle is an exceedingly delicate piece of mechanism, which, weighing in its rough forged state no less than 51b., is reduced after 192 processes to 1¼lb. Owing to the position of the magazine it is necessary to have a hole 3½ inches long through the middle of the rifle. [1634](#) This most expensive portion of the rifle is a mere framework of unhardened iron, only .10 inches on the under side and that cut away very much for the cutoff. Next, I come to a still more important portion—the bolt of the rifle itself, which I hold in my hand. It has the appearance of being an exceedingly solid and strong piece of mechanism, but I can assure the House it is nothing of the kind; it is a fraud, a snare, and a delusion. This delusion is assisted by the bolt-cover, which I now remove. See the small diameter of the bolt, which is moreover in two parts—the bolt-head and bolt proper, the latter bored out through all its length to contain main-spring and striker. The bolt-head is attached to the bolt by means of the small bolt-head screw, which only projects one-tenth of an inch into a slot cut in the neck of the bolt-head. The wear and tear of the swivelling round of the two parts of the bolt in opening and shutting the breech, and the whole strain of extracting, must be borne by this small surface of the bolt-head screw. From a Return issued this morning, however, it appears that the bolt-head screw has been abolished altogether. This is a very sudden change to have taken place. So late as December last an exhibition took place in the House of an improved pattern of the rifle known as Mark II., and assurances were given that the bolt-head screw was adequate, that all that it required was to be a little better tempered in order to make it perfectly satisfactory. Yet within six weeks the bolt-head screw is abolished altogether. This is not very re-assuring. It leads to the impression that if those who are responsible for this rifle can change their mind so quickly, there may be other flaws of which they may hereafter be convinced. With regard to this bolt-head itself, it appeared to be weak and unsuited to support the great strain which would be thrown on it. This, indeed, was shown from the result of trials that had already been made. A Report has been given us with regard to the trial of 350 rifles. It is contained in a Blue Book, of

which a single copy is in the Library, although it has not been presented to the House itself.

§ THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR (Mr. E. STANHOPE, Lincolnshire, Horncastle)

I told the right hon. Gentle- [1635](#) man that if any Member will move for the Return it will be laid on the Table at once.

§ MR. MARJORIBANKS

In the Reports I find that out of 350 brand new rifles no fewer than 12 had their bolt-head fractured, and in 8 the bolt-head cover was fractured. Thus, in 20 cases out of 350, or more than 5 per cent., either the bolt-head or the bolt-head cover was fractured. These figures show that there is great weakness in this portion of the bolt. Attached to the bolt-head is the extractor. It is not a direct extractor, like the Martini-Henry and all our quick-firing guns have, but is a spring snap extractor; it does not precede the cartridge into the chamber, but is pushed past and over the rim of the cartridge, where it is already seated in the chamber. This is a system acknowledged to be wrong in principle. The spring is small and weak, cannot be easily cleaned, will become rusty and corroded by the gases of explosion and be certain to give way. With regard to the striker and mainspring, they ought to be so adjusted as to be easily accessible from the base of the bolt, and not require a special tool to remove them in case of accident. When the bolt is drawn back a very slight touch will screw round the end of the striker and cause the jamming of the gun itself. This defect has been strongly commented on by the Inspector of Musketry at Aldershot, who reports that of the 40 rifles tried nearly all of them were injured at the shoulder from this cause and adds "this should be rendered impossible." When the rifle is at full cock the cocking piece projects $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches behind the bolt; a comparatively slight blow would bend the striker and throw the rifle out of gear. The arrangements for safety are most unsatisfactory. It is exceedingly difficult to place the rifle at half-cock, and when it stands at half-cock it is impossible to open it. Even in nimble and agile fingers it will be found difficult to let down the cocking piece to half-cock without its slipping from the hold. The right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War was good enough to lend me a rifle, which I tried and returned to him. Afterwards I wished to get one for myself and I managed to find one for sale in London. [1636](#) I went to the shop and was about to take it up, when the head man said, "Don't touch that rifle, Sir; it's very greasy. I will show it you." Having wiped it, he proceeded to seize the bolt to work it, but could not open it. He said, "I don't know what's the matter with it." I said, "Why, you have it at half-cock." Now, if an expert like this man, in the quiet of a London shop, finds a difficulty in working the rifle, would not a soldier in the excitement of action, or on a dark night, experience much greater difficulty? One more word with regard to half-cock. If the bolt, instead of being shut home, is only half closed, the soldier may think he has closed it, and he pulls at the trigger. The rifle does not go off, but falls very nearly to half-cock. He sees the bolt standing nearly straight and gives it a knock to knock it down. It does then fall to half-cock, and the rifle refuses to open. Well, these are little things that are very likely to happen on active service, and they are things which a soldier ought not to be subject to. Then I find very great fault indeed with the fact that there is not a proper safety bolt on the rifle. There ought to be a bolt which would fasten at any time, and which, when closed, would still permit the

rifle to be opened or shut. To say that the half-cock is any safety at all is simply ridiculous. On the contrary, the present arrangement would, in action, be a source of great danger to the front rank man. Unless it is altered, I, myself, would certainly far sooner be in the rear than in the front rank. Let me now allude to the magazine. A great deal has been sacrificed to this magazine, and yet it is one of the most flimsy things a man ever held in his hand. It consists of a flimsy platform, a weak and flimsy spring and a flimsy case. The magazine is to be attached to the rifle, and is supposed to form a reserve of safety in moments of extreme danger. It is supposed never to be called into play unless what is called, in technical phrase, "the supreme moment" has arrived, but who is to decide as to the occurrence of the "supreme moment?" The soldier, I rather fancy, will think that moment has arrived whenever he is too lazy to put his hand into his pouch. The soldier, it is understood, is to be taught never to use the magazine except under special [1637](#) orders. He is always to be taught to use the method of single-loading. Suppose the "supreme moment" has arrived, and the soldier has received the order and is firing away excitedly, he will most assuredly be likely to fall into the routine of his ordinary drill, and load as a single loader, with his magazine cut-off open. The result with this rifle will be that the cartridges will jam. I will give the House some official opinions on this magazine. From the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards we have this view— The magazine spring often gets out of order, and cartridges jam, both in filling and loading from magazine. The Report from Her Majesty's ship Excellent says, with reference to the defects in the magazine— Springs become weak after much work. Base of a cartridge liable to get under spring cover and cause delay in loading. Jams caused by two cartridges trying to get in chamber together, due to defect of spring cover. The Committee at Meerut says— Magazine flimsy, and could be easily knocked out of shape. The Official Inspectors of Musketry at Hythe declares that the Magazine was easily dented or otherwise injured. Difficult to clean if rusty or dirty inside—liable to be lost. With special reference to the said magazine they say— No advantage can be discovered, and there are certainly many objections. Rapidity not greater than with single loader, when six or more cartridges have to be fired as well as magazine. When magazine fire is interrupted—that is, used in combination with loading from pouch—the rate of firing is very slow. They add— We earnestly hope that even now the principle of detachable magazines may be reconsidered. We understand that the sole object in the introduction of a magazine rifle is to have for a certainty, on some critical moment in a battle, a supply of cartridges which can be fired with great rapidity. So important is this apparently considered, that rapidity in single loading is to some extent sacrificed for it. We are convinced that the machinery on which this effect, the *raison d'être* of a magazine arm, depends, should be a fixed integral part of the rifle, guarded jealously from injury or loss in its place, and effective at the required moment. Now, Sir, though I do not pretend to have exhausted the list of defects to be found in this weapon, I will not go more into the details of the rifle, but I would wish for one moment to refer to these Reports to the conditions under [1638](#) which they were made. 350 magazine rifles were sent out in the autumn of 1888, and 50 carbines, to be tried by various bodies of men. They were all at that time brand new. They were manufactured for the express purpose of being thus handed out for trial. We never have contended that this Committee, and the War Office, and the Enfield authorities were such utterly incapable people that they would turn out a rifle which would break down at the first touch. It would have been a thing beyond conception if these trial rifles had utterly broken down under such circumstances. I must complain of the way in which this Report has been, I might almost say, manipulated. Twenty-two questions were put to

the various bodies to whom the rifles were issued. What is called a Summary of these Reports is given in page 144. In that Summary they do not deal with question by question, and give a Summary of the answers favourable or unfavourable to each. The 22 questions are compressed into 14. To show the method of compression, let me give an instance. The second question is as to the liability of clothing or equipment to be damaged by the rifle, and the third as to the liability of the arm, or any portion of it, to be damaged by the rough usage of the service. These are compressed into: "Is the rifle liable to become damaged or to injure the uniform or equipment?" I do think we had a right to expect that in the Summary of the Reports we should have been given a statement of the actual injuries suffered by the rifles, as reported by the various bodies to whom they were submitted. We have no such data. We are told the Reports were altogether practically satisfactory, and all mention of hostile criticism, except with regard to the ejector springs, is suppressed. It is curious to notice the different tone of the Reports received from the Army and from the Navy. There are two rather remarkable Reports from naval authorities with reference to the rifle. The officer commanding Her Majesty's ship Cambridge says he Considers it a matter for the gravest consideration whether the naval rifle should be of so small a bore as .303 in. He is of opinion the .402 in. bore would be most suitable for naval service. He prefers 'block action' to the 'bolt.' He does not consider a magazine [1639](#) necessary for the Navy, it being unsuitable for ship work, and it would encourage waste of ammunition. A new weapon not so much required as a superior training to develop to the utmost the powers of the one we possess. The Board of Officers of the Royal Marine Artillery who considered the matter, report— The present system of magazine not sufficiently advantageous to counterbalance disadvantages of rifle. Board are of opinion that a combination of the magazine rifle barrel and the Martini-Henry block system would constitute a better rifle. Besides this, we have the Report from the officers and sergeant instructors at Hythe, and it does seem to me that if any body of men are worth listening to on such a matter it is they. I do not want to weary the House by reading their Report; I will merely read a Memorandum on that Report by General Sir Redvers Buller, which sums it up in a single sentence. He says— There is not much in this, except a general condemnation of the rifle which has just been approved. I must say it seems to me very strong action to have lightly set aside so decided a Report from such a quarter. With regard to the Committee which was primarily responsible for the magazine rifle, no one Government can be held accountable for it. It was appointed as far back as April, 1883, and continued at work until 1888; and it consisted of three soldiers, General Philip Smith, Colonel Slade, and Colonel Tongue, one naval officer, Captain Jackson, Sir Henry Halford, a distinguished smallbore shot, and a late much lamented Member of the House of Commons, Mr. Guy Dawnay, a dear friend of my own and many other hon. Members. I do not want to criticise the individual members of the Committee. I do not think it was as good a Committee as might have been got together; but, admitting that the Committee was a satisfactory one for the purpose of deciding between the merits of different guns submitted for approval, I say it was a Committee utterly unfit to invent a gun on its own account; and that was what it turned its attention to. Between 1883 and 1885, though no public advertisement was given asking for rifles to be submitted, and no public trials instituted, no fewer than 31 different kinds of rifles were submitted, and by November, 1885, it was found [1640](#) that only two rifles had survived the trials. These were the Lee rifle and the Owen-Jones rifle. Between November, 1885, and September, 1886, the Committee appear to have held no meetings—a fact which is not easily explicable—but in September, 1886, the Lee rifle was finally adopted. The

breech mechanism of the present rifle, however, has been evolved since the date of the adoption of the Lee rifle; and, indeed, little of the Lee principle is now left beside the fact that there is a detachable magazine placed in front of the trigger-guard, necessitating the use of a bolt system of breech action. Between September, 1886, and the period of the issue of 350 rifles for report, the Committee was at work building up a rifle. The members of the Committee were not mechanics, but they had the run of the Enfield yards, and the assistance of the Assistant-Superintendent, Mr. Speed. Mr. Speed took out various patents connected with the processes of manufacture of various parts of the rifle. I asked for a Return as to the amount of royalty paid in respect of these patents. I was told that no royalty had yet been paid, and that no decision had yet been come to as to what reward should be given. This may be the case with regard to the Government factory, but it is difficult to understand how the various private factories engaged in the production of the rifle can have avoided paying something for the patents. The House has a right to know what has been the cost of the experiments, and how much money the Small Arms Committee has expended in arriving at those particular points on which Mr. Speed has taken out patents. The result is, at any rate, that an exceedingly expensive rifle is being manufactured. The War Office put the cost of the weapon during the past year at £5 5s. a rifle, and the Financial Secretary told us the other day that the estimate taken out for next year was £4: a rifle, congratulating the House on the cheapness of the weapon. But the estimate for next year is a very different thing from the cost which may be actually incurred for these rifles. The French Lebel rifle costs 40f.; the Mauser rifle is now offered for sale for 80f.; the Mannlicher rifle is sold for 75f.; while for the British magazine rifle I have myself paid eight guineas in the open [1641](#) market. The Return just given to the House shows the necessity of the great cost of this rifle. The old Martini-Henry cost about two guineas, and had 61 component parts, as against 98 in the magazine rifle. In the manufacture of the Martini-Henry rifle there were 991 processes; in that of the magazine rifle there are 1,611. The number of workmen required to produce 1,000 rifles in 54 hours is for the Martini-Henry 751, and for the magazine rifle 1,310; therefore, the number of hours worked in the production of 1,000 Martini-Henry rifles is 40,554, and of 1,000 magazine rifles 70,740. I quite agree with the Secretary for War that it is quite impossible for the House to properly discuss the details of the new rifle; but when it is found that the rifle has been passed by a Committee who themselves invented it, when it is found that the cost of that weapon is double that of the old English one, and greatly exceeds that of all those recently adopted by foreign countries, and when it is found there is a vast body of military, naval, and non-professional opinion hostile to, or severely critical of, the mechanical principles on which it depends, surely it is time for the House to insist that a body of expert mechanics should examine it, to see whether it is constructed on sound mechanical principles. All I ask the House to do is to take proper precautions with regard to this rifle. After the Report of the Commission presided over by the noble Lord the Member for Rossendale, it is impossible for the House to accept with blind confidence everything that is done by the War Office. Any right hon. Gentleman who possesses racehorses knows that a horse may be exceedingly good looking and exceedingly fast, and yet have some weak point. Such a horse may pass through all its preparations and trials satisfactorily, and yet break down when the supreme moment comes, owing, to a great extent, to the very trials which it has previously undergone. If the Secretary for War were buying a horse, he would not take the views of the breeder and the owner of the horse as final. He would probably call in an expert to find whether the horse was really sound. On the same principle, I now ask the House

of [1642](#) Commons to refer the new rifle to a small body of mechanical experts outside the influence of the War Office, so as to enable the House to form an accurate judgment on this very difficult matter. I beg to move the Resolution standing in my name.

§ Motion made, and Question proposed, That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying Her Majesty to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into the merits of the magazine rifle, and all the circumstances attending its adoption."—(Mr. Marjoribanks.)

§ (5.16.) [MR. HANBURY \(Preston\)](#)

Whatever opinion we may have as to the reference suggested by the right hon. Gentleman opposite, I think we must all congratulate him on the utter absence of all Party spirit from the tone of his speech. Surely, if there is one subject more than another on which upon both sides of the House there ought to be no Party animus, nor any charge of Party disloyalty, it is one like this, which is purely a matter of administration connected with the defence of the country. I do not pretend to follow the right hon. Gentleman into all the details, technical and mechanical, into which he has gone in regard to the new magazine rifle. On them I am not capable of forming an opinion, and I do not suppose there are many of us here who are capable of forming an opinion; but at the same time there are facts in connection with the introduction of this new rifle on which we are capable of forming an opinion. It is admitted that the Committee of experts—some persons say experts, and some say amateurs—but at any rate the Committee who had the selection of the new rifle, instead of being the judges of a number of rifles submitted to them, and having the opportunity of picking out the best and most effective weapon, constituted themselves rifle inventors, and became interested in pushing this particular rifle from first to last. At any rate, it is beyond doubt that at the Enfield Factory itself there were official patentees of this rifle, and when I state that one of the factory officials, Mr. Speed, out of 13 patents connected with this rifle, holds no less than 10 in his own name, I think the House will agree with me in saying that once for all we ought to put an end to this system of official patentees, because it is utterly unfair to the inventors who come before [1643](#) the heads of the Government establishments, where they get their brains picked by the officials, and have their ideas appropriated. Whether they get royalties I do not know, but I think that is a point on which we ought to have a distinct statement from the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War. I will go one step further, and say that if there is one body in England which ought to be able to express an expert and qualified opinion on the new rifle it is those who are at the head of the School of Musketry at Hythe. Well, what happened? The School of Musketry at Hythe passed a severe condemnation on this rifle. Colonel Tongue, who was the head of the School at Hythe, was one of those who were put upon the Committee of Choice, and a more inappropriate man you could not possibly have had on such a Committee; because, as the head of the School of Musketry, he was one of those to whom appeal would be made as to the merits of the rifle in the last resort, and therefore he ought to have had no direct interest in pushing forward that particular weapon. The heads of the School at Hythe ought to be a body capable of giving a free and unbiassed opinion on such a subject. But what has been the case? Colonel Slade, who was one of the most energetic members of the Committee, is now the head of the School of Musketry at Hythe. That, I think, is not the way in which the Government ought to have

proceeded. So far, I am in agreement with the right hon. Gentleman opposite; but when he comes to the remedy, I am obliged to differ from him. What I say is this,—either the War Office is right at the present moment or it is not. If it be right, the proposed remedy of the right hon. Gentleman would prove dilatory and mischievous, and would postpone the introduction of the new rifle for a considerable time, and we have already been nearly ten years considering what new rifle we should have. Moreover, if the War Office is right, the less we interfere with the Government establishments the better, and therefore the Royal Commission which is proposed would be an unnecessary evil. But, on the other hand, if the War Office is wrong, then I say the remedy would prove wholly inadequate. If, with all its money, all the talent it has at its command, and all the time it [1644](#) has at its disposal—it being now nearly eight years since the Committee began to sit on this subject—if, under these circumstances, the War Office cannot perform one of its most ordinary duties in regard to the supply of arms for the service of the country, I think we shall require something of a much more stringent and drastic character than a mere inquiry into the way in which it has dealt with the introduction of this particular arm. If it be the case that the War Office has been so thoroughly inefficient, as has been pointed out, then I say it wants overhauling from top to bottom, and not a mere inquiry such as is now suggested. The right hon. Gentleman says that this is exactly what Lord Hartington's Commission recommended; but are we right in trusting to Royal Commissions? We have already had so many of them sitting at the War Office that the War Office ought to be at the present moment one of the most perfect bodies under Heaven. On the question of the introduction of new arms and new materials of war into the Service, you had only two or three years ago a Royal Commission, which was presided over by Mr. Justice Stephen, and on which my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for the Horsham Division of Sussex (Sir W. Barttelot) sat. That Committee went fully into the question as to how the War Office should undertake the supply of arms to the Service; and what was the result? The way in which this Committee of experts, or amateurs, has recommended this rifle has been at the bottom of the whole mischief, and what has been done in regard to it has been done in the face of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Committee over which Mr. Justice Stephen presided. What did Mr. Justice Stephen say on the subject? He said— These Committees have no continuity; they involve no official responsibility; they are often unfitted to the work; they sit only when it suits their convenience; they are liable to be dissolved at any moment, or to be re-constituted or superseded at a moment's notice; and their proceedings are often dilatory, confused, and unsatisfactory to the last degree. And this is the very Committee on the recommendation of which we have been asked to adopt this new rifle. It is quite clear that Royal Commissions will not do the work for us, because the War [1645](#) Office does not carry out their recommendations. What we want is something more potent—something that will speak with a stronger voice than a Royal Commission. The only body that can speak with that strong and potent voice is the public; and, although the War Office does not mind these Reports of Committees and Commissions, it may be influenced by the voice of public opinion. No doubt the Government does not object to the appointment of a Commission to deal with matters of this kind, because they know that when the people see that a Royal Commission has been appointed they say, "Ah, now it will be all right. A Royal Commission has been appointed, and it will inquire into the whole facts, and take care of our interests." In this way public opinion is deadened, the subject is dropped, and nothing more is heard of the matter, at any rate, unless some catastrophe or accident should happen, or some great mischief result. When this is the

case the War Office is then able to turn round upon its Royal Commission, and say—"That Commission was appointed to take all the responsibility off our hands, and therefore you must not blame us in the matter." That, Sir, is one reason why I do not want a Royal Commission. What I say is, that the proper thing for us to do is to lay the full burden of responsibility on the War Office, to see that that Department does its work, and to punish those who do not perform their duties in a proper manner. But it is said if you have a Royal Commission you will get a great deal of information out of it. I think there is already a great deal of information on this subject, even down to the most minute technical details. The right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War has been in receipt of the most valuable Reports, and he has also before him the extremely valuable letters which have appeared in the Times—letters which, I believe, will be found to be of considerable service. [Mr. E. STANHOPE shook his head.] Well, we shall see how that is by-and-by. At any rate, we can, after all, ensure the whole of the information we require without any Royal Commission at all, and it ought to be laid before this House as soon as possible. It lies with the War Office to furnish the information. Let us also see what has been done in regard to [1646](#) this matter elsewhere. We should like to know what the Indian Government has to say on the question of this rifle. We ought to have the opinion of that Government as an independent authority, because I think it would be a valuable thing for us to know what it has to say on the subject. I find that the Victorian Government, as is stated in the Melbourne Argus, gave an order for 5,000 of these rifles, and that all of a sudden that order was countermanded. We should like to see the correspondence between the War Office and these two Governments on this subject. But if we are in want of information, surely we can get it by word of mouth from the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State in this House quite as well as by means of a Royal Commission. If the information is to be got in an official way we shall not get it any the better from a Royal Commission than from the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War. I know that it is frequently said, on behalf of the Government, that papers which are asked for are confidential. But we want to get hold of the papers in this case, and to know what the Colonial Authorities and the Indian Government have to say in regard to these things. We shall, however, never get full information on these subjects until the House and the country are treated with a little less reserve on the part of the Government Authorities. These are matters on which the public has the right to full information, and we have pretty good evidence, as given before Mr. Justice Stephen's Commission, that the public does not get full information. The late Adjutant General Lord Wolseley stated that One of the most serious complaints that can be brought against the system of the administration of the Army, and the system of Government as it bears on the Army, is that we do not tell the truth to the English people. If we could only get more explicit answers to some of the questions that are put in this House, the country would be better informed as to how the service is to be supplied with proper and efficient arms. It is the system of secrecy that is adopted in regard to these matters which is doing the Government more harm than almost anything else; it is from this that its difficulties mainly arise. If the War Office would only [1647](#) take the country into its confidence, we should hear a good deal more about this rifle than we know at present; and, for my part, I think that after all a good deal may be said on the side of the new weapon. We have not heard what are the tests that have been applied to it by the Colonial and the Indian Governments, nor have we been informed as to what they have to say on the subject. I do, however, happen to know that this rifle was submitted to a very severe test by the Roumanian Government, who had it tried in competition with a certain number of other rifles of a similar character, and that the result was that

the magazine rifle, which, has been adopted by Her Majesty's Government, came out first. That being so, it is, as far as it goes, a justification for the selection of this rifle; and, at the same time, it is obvious that rival inventors would be only too keen in endeavouring to get the Government to put aside the rifle they have adopted in favour of their own particular weapons. There can be little doubt that a good deal of the opposition to the new rifle does come from these rival inventors. As a matter of fact, much the same opposition was raised against the Martini-Henry rifle, and it was fully two years or more after the first issue of that rifle that it was perfected. If the Government would only take the public into its confidence, it may be that there is much to be said for this rifle. I think it is the duty of the Government to do so. It is important, in the interests of the nation, that the soldier should not get into his head that he is armed with an inefficient weapon. Once get that into his head, and he will never like his weapon. This is what strikes me: either the War Office in this case is the most reckless and headstrong Department that ever existed, or it has got thorough confidence in its rifle, because it is going on with the manufacture of it, as the right hon. Gentleman said, "With a rapidity unexampled in the history of this country." In the face of Hythe, of the FitzJames Stephen Commission, and of the Indian and Colonial evidence, they are proceeding with the manufacture of this rifle at a rate unexampled in the history of this country. It is perfectly incredible that the War Office, if it has any suspicion of its own rifle, [1648](#) should go on with its manufacture at the pace it does. For these reasons I object to the Royal Commission suggested by the right hon. Gentleman opposite. We must have one of two things: If the War Office refuses inquiry into this rifle, and takes the entire responsibility on its own shoulders, then we ought to know exactly who it is we are trusting. What is the real and main object of my Amendment? If we are not going to have an inquiry by an outside body, then we must press home the responsibility of the War Office to the utmost extent.

[§ MR. E. STANHOPE](#)

Hear, hear!

[§ MR. HANBURY](#)

My right hon. Friend says "Hear, hear!" to that. My right hon. Friend objects to anonymous criticism of this War Office rifle. I, on my part, object to the anonymous responsibility for this rifle. It is not the right hon. Gentleman who is responsible. That would be wanting in reason. It is utterly impossible that responsibility of this sort should be thrown purely on the Secretary of State for War. We all know what would happen. If the worst come to the worst, we should have a five-line Whip sent out on Government authority, and his sole responsibility would vanish. It is impossible that any one man, civilian or military, can be responsible for all the details of the War Office. And the right hon. Gentleman has very wisely and betimes guarded himself against any possibility of being made responsible for this rifle. I saw the other day what I thought was a very sensible letter on the subject, in which the writer says that whether the rifle is or is not a suitable weapon for the British Army, it is not a matter upon which any weight would, or ought to, attach to the Secretary of State's opinion. If that is the case, then we cannot hold him responsible. Again, Mr. Justice Stephen's opinion is worth nothing, and he was the head of the Commission which considered the subject; nor is the Small Arms Committee responsible. The extract from the Report says—"We cannot be held responsible in any sense." Then I want to know

who is responsible? The right hon. Gentleman referred us to Sir Redvers Buller, but that officer says—"I know nothing about rifles; I do not profess to be any authority." [1649](#) That would appear to suggest that you cannot hold him responsible. Going a step further, the right hon. Gentleman referred us to the large body—he does not tell us who they were—which passed judgment upon this rifle. He says that the reports of the trials being satisfactory a meeting was held at which were present the Duke of Cambridge, Mr. Stanhope, General Wolseley, Sir Redvers Buller, Major General Alderson, Sir Frederick Abel, Mr. Anderson, Mr. J. Rigby, and others. Well, that is a very lax responsibility—"and others." I want to know every one who was there. Sir Redvers Buller has generally disclaimed responsibility.

§ [THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY TO THE WAR OFFICE \(Mr. BRODRICK, Surrey, Guildford\)](#)

He is incorrectly reported. The only statement made is that contained in an anonymous letter in the Times this morning.

§ [MR. HANBURY](#)

I beg pardon; I read the speech of Sir Redvers Buller, I think both in the Times and in the Broad Arrow. I have seen no contradiction of it. I understand he is to be held responsible. Then is everybody in this large body to be held responsible? That is really the gist of the whole question. I should say that the man who is to be held responsible is the Director of Artillery—General Alderson. He is an expert, at the head of this particular Department. My sole object in introducing the Amendment is to get a statement from the Secretary of State as to who, if anything goes wrong, is going to be dismissed from his position, who deprived of his pension, who punished for providing the British Army with a thoroughly bad weapon. We cannot have responsibility of a general character put upon the War Office; there have been too many breaks-down in that Department lately. The country has a right to demand from the right hon. Gentleman information as to who is responsible. If, as I firmly believe, to a certain extent this rifle is a good one, we want to know who will have the credit of it; and if it is a bad one, then who is the man who should be punished for handing a bad weapon to the British troops? I have introduced my Amendment with the object of ascertaining exactly where the responsibility lies. I beg to move [1650](#) the Amendment of which I have given notice.

§ Amendment proposed, To leave out from the word "That" to the end of the Question, in order to add the words "It is undesirable, by the appointment of a Royal Commission inquiring into a detail of military administration, to weaken the full responsibility of the officials, specially charged with that duty, for the recommendation and adoption of the new magazine rifle,"—(Mr. Hanbury,) —instead thereof.

§ Question proposed, "That the words proposed to be left out stand part of the Question."

§ [MAJOR RASCH](#) (Essex, S.E.)

I beg to second the Amendment.

§ (5.26.) [COLONEL NOLAN \(Galway, N.\)](#)

Sir, when the hon. Member for Preston speaks on military administration I very often support his views, and I agree with much, not all, that he has said on this occasion. This question is a very peculiar one, and it is one, beside the importance of which the question of responsibility of particular officers or bodies sinks into insignificance. The national existence depends upon whether the rifle with which our troops are armed is good or bad. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Berwick has enlightened the House by a most interesting speech, and he has given us most valuable information. On this question the right hon. Gentleman is a specialist. His performances with the rifle rival Locksley's, in *Ivanhoe* with the long bow. I myself have seen the right hon. Gentleman make 19 bull's-eyes out of 20. [Cheers.] The House has a right to cheer, for the occasion to which I refer was when the right hon. Gentleman was the champion of this House against the Representatives of another place. The right hon. Gentleman pulled various pieces of the rifle out of different pockets in the course of his instructive and interesting observations; and at one time I thought he had put on a poacher's coat, and that he was going to pull out the stock and barrel, which he could well have done, as the magazine rifle has a divided stock. The right hon. Gentleman divided his subject into four heads, and I will deal with them, though not from the mechanical point of view. I have gone through a special course at Enfield [1651](#) with respect to the rifle, so that I know something of the subject. I think the right hon. Gentleman made a mistake in going into too many details. But he has raised an important question, namely, the reduction of the bore. In Europe, up to five or six years ago, every country except, perhaps, Switzerland had a bore of 44 hundredths. That was the average over Europe. Some five years ago the French made a regular revolution in small arms by reducing the bore from 44 hundredths to 30 hundredths. They have the whole honour and glory of that movement, though the Swiss had shown the way to a certain extent. The reduction from 44 hundredths to 30 hundredths appears at first sight considerable. But that is quite insignificant. You must go by the cube of this ratio of 3 to 2, and I say that the change if measured by the cube increases the effectiveness of the rifle enormously. The reduction of the bore to which the right hon. Gentleman objects has enabled the authorities to reap tremendous advantages. In the first place, the trajectory is flattened. If a bullet from a Martini just grazed the head of a man at 1,000 yards' range it would fall 28 yards beyond him, while a bullet from the new rifle would fall 52 yards beyond him. When you come to using the rifle in action it may be taken that the difference in the execution done by the two rifles will be in proportion to those figures, or about five to three. Then the recoil is reduced. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Berwickshire is an accomplished marksman and does not shirk the kick, but the ordinary soldier looks upon the Martini very much as he looks on a kicking horse—he is afraid of it, and under such circumstances you cannot expect him to aim correctly. But the right hon. Gentleman has said that the kick of the new rifle compared with the Martini is as 7 to 45, which means that the kick of the new rifle will have practically no effect on the shoulder. That will make it possible to train a soldier much more quickly, besides enabling him to fire a great number of rounds without the bruising of the shoulder which results from firing 45 to 50 rounds with the Martini. The right hon. Gentleman said the bore should not be reduced beyond the point at which a leaden bullet could be used. That view was discussed in [1652](#) the *Times* this morning, but the writers did not condescend to give figures. The right hon. Gentleman gives .320 as a bore which would stand a leaden bullet. That is very little larger than the present bore, which is

.303, and I doubt whether the right hon. Gentleman can prove that his figure is correct. I know that experiments have been made at Enfield, from which it would appear that .400 is the smallest bore suited to a leaden bullet. I do not believe any force armed with .450 bore rifles could stand against troops armed with rifles of .303 bore, the advantages of which are so enormous. They would be out-shot at the long ranges, and also would not be able to carry so many cartridges. Every one wanted to reduce the bore. It was known that if that were done there must be a longer bullet, and, to prevent it turning, greater speed would have to be imparted to it, and then there was the danger that the rifle would get foul through powder lodging in the grooves. Therefore, it was decided to have a nickel or copper or iron and zinc covering instead of a pure leaden bullet. It was objected to by some military men that such a bullet would stick in the rifle, but there is really no practical difficulty with the bullet sheath, which only sticks when the rifle-barrel is perfectly clean. If an oiled rag is passed down the barrel, or if the soldier breathes down it, the sheath will not stick, even on the first shot afterwards the sheath never sticks. There need be no difficulty except that arising from utter and supreme carelessness. I do not think the "striking power" is of much consequence. That argument was used against the Minié rifle, as compared with the Brown Bess. I think men of ordinary courage will be stopped by one of the small bullets, but if not, then the magazine will enable the soldier to put in two or three bullets. Even if the small bullet will not stop a horse, as a general rule the rider will stop it if there is a shower of bullets. The second great difference between the old rifle and the new is the change from the falling block to the bolt system of breech action. The bolt system is, I think, much the simpler. There is nothing rash in that change, for the bolt action has been, thoroughly tried all over Europe [1653](#) for 25 years. I believe the United States are the only people who follow us, and they have, I believe, not a falling but a rising block breech action. A falling block is probably incompatible with a magazine, for if the falling block is used the cartridges must be pushed in with the finger, while the bolt action pushes them in itself in the act of closing the breech. I repeat that in making this change we have done nothing rash; indeed we have taken a wise and prudent step, as the bolt system has been tried in any number of campaigns with every success. I do not think the right hon. Gentleman has done the Government justice in not giving them credit for this change. As to the details of the breech action, I think them of secondary importance. I generally find when anything goes wrong with the breech mechanism of a fowling-piece that it is because the gunmaker has been trying to sail round somebody's patent. That can hardly be the case here, for the Government have annexed everybody's patents. The points of detail with which the right hon. Gentleman has found fault are chiefly questions of manufacture. The extractor is a well-known one, and there has only been one doubtful case of failure. At Woolwich only one bolt-head has been injured in the rifles used for proving ammunition, and that is a very small proportion after 20,000 rounds from that particular rifle. The right hon. Gentleman said that the extractor is weak, and that it is short; but in such mechanism the shorter a thing is the better, because it is less likely to bend, and this extractor always goes on pulling out the cartridges. The right hon. Gentleman also objected to the strikers and to the main spring. As a matter of fact, Hythe lately tried 100 new main springs; only one broke, and the rifle fired well with the broken one; but I think that we may now rely on the main springs, which are similar to those which have been tried on the Continent in great wars, while that in the new rifle has less pressure on it than was the case in the Continental rifles. I do not see how the extractor spring can break. Several have been tried during the last few weeks. Out of five in the hands of troops one broke; but, on

the other hand, out of five which snapped 2,000 [1654](#) rounds none broke, and similar success attended five which snapped 40,000 rounds. With regard to sand, the rifle has been, tried in Egypt, and after being buried 24 hours in the sand all has gone well. I therefore think that it may be assumed that the rifle will stand sand. I believe that now soldiers are in favour of the rifle. Of course, there have been some small faults, such, for instance, as in the screw which has joined the bolt head to the bolt, but there is no fault now in that respect. We cannot expect to change from a large to a small bore and from a falling block system to a bolt system without some mistakes being made, especially when the rifle is being manufactured at a great rate. I will now pass from the details of the bolt to what has been called an essential feature of the rifle, namely, the magazine. The right hon. Gentleman did not object to a magazine very much, I suppose, because he considers that a magazine is, on the whole, a useful addition to a rifle. Nearly every country has a magazine rifle except Russia, which has a rifle which takes six or seven cartridges on the top of the barrel in a quick loader. But the right hon. Gentleman objects to this magazine on the ground that it ought to be fixed, and he also finds fault with the magazine spring. I am informed on the best authority that out of 100 which have been in daily use by soldiers for six weeks not one has failed or showed any sign of rust. I think that is a very fair test. Again, these magazines are not of very great importance; they can be rapidly changed. In the United States Navy they keep us in countenance in this matter, for they use a detachable magazine on the Lee system. It is easier to take out the magazine and put in another than to fill a fixed magazine with cartridges, and the magazine now in use cannot really drop out. In action fresh magazines can be brought up and supplied to the troops, and therefore I consider that a detachable magazine is a very valuable feature, and far surpasses any fixed one. I do not think that there is any fear of the cartridges not coming out of the magazine separately; of course, if a man tries to put a cartridge into the barrel without cutting off the magazine there will be two cartridges at once, but even then nothing will [1655](#) happen to put the rifle out of order. Of course, a great deal must necessarily be speculation. Hon. Members would like to know how these weapons would answer in warfare, but we cannot get up a first-class war in order to try a rifle. I believe that in 1885, in the war between the French and the Chinese, the Lee rifle proved an excellent weapon. Some 36,000 of these weapons were sent out, together with 36,000,000 rounds of cartridges, to the Chinese, and the defeat of the French at Loo Shoon is generally attributed to the Lee rifle, although the French had the Kroapetsky fixed magazine rifle. We only differ from all the other nations with regard to the magazine rifle in one important point, and that is in reference to the detachable magazine. On every other broad point we agree with every other country in the world. As to the smaller points referred to by the right hon. Gentleman, I have no doubt they may be very usefully considered, and I think the Secretary for War ought to have them carefully inquired into. But they are only points of detail, and I believe that up to the present the rifle has been very successful.

§ (6.2.) [MR. E. STANHOPE](#)

I shall have to ask for the indulgence of the House for the large number of details which it will be necessary for me to refer to in the course of my remarks, but I ask for it upon no other grounds. I have been attacked outside the House very bitterly; but, for my part, I should be very sorry to answer my critics in the same spirit in which they have attacked me. The object of every one in the House is, I am quite sure, to arrive at the truth, and, therefore, I appeal with the utmost confidence to this much fairer

tribunal to deal with the matter in a spirit of absolute fairness. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hanbury) has asked us to show less reserve. I am not conscious myself of having shown any reserve. All the Reports which have been asked for have been laid on the Table of the House, and they could have been printed if it had been desired. Certainly, so far as I am concerned, I have no desire to keep back anything. I desire in every respect to take the House into our confidence, because I believe that the more we take the House into our confidence the more [1656](#) certainly shall we be supported in the steps we have taken. I think the House will be of opinion that, while I must go into many details, without unnecessarily wearying it with them, it is my duty, first of all, to dwell upon some points of principle that have been raised. The right hon. Gentleman opposite, about the tone or substance of whose speech I make no complaint at all, has asked for an inquiry by a Royal Commission. Well, I confess I should be exceedingly glad to take it upon myself to give an inquiry, if I saw my way to do so, that would relieve the War Office of some responsibility. We have got, we believe, a good rifle, and in our opinion the more inquiry we have the better that rifle will come out. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston has moved an Amendment to the effect that the House ought not to take away any of the responsibility from the War Office, which has chosen and issued the new rifle, by the appointment of any Commission of Inquiry or by any outside inquiry at all. I entirely agree with the proposition of my hon. Friend. The position is this—we have chosen and issued a new rifle. We fully accept the responsibility for what we have done, and I think it would be very unwise, and hardly in accordance with the practice of the House of Commons, were they to appoint a Commission of Inquiry to take away responsibility from those to whom it rightly belongs, and confer it upon some body constituted we do not know how. Therefore, if we come to a Division—and I hope we may not be required to do so—I shall certainly be prepared to vote for the Amendment of my hon. Friend. Now, Sir, let me ask this question: What is the nature of the responsibility for this rifle? Who, in short, is to choose a new rifle which is to be put into the hands of the troops? On this question I believe I shall receive the universal assent of the House to the proposition I lay down. In the first place, it is not the Secretary of State upon whom devolves primarily the responsibility for the choice of a new rifle. A good deal has been argued out of doors on this question. But if I had overridden the opinion of all the authorities, and had given the troops on my own responsibility a rifle of my own choosing, I should like to know what would not have been said, and justly said, against [1657](#) me. The House will remember perfectly well, how Sir FitzJames Stephen's Commission censured the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Edinburgh for doing what he says, and I believe rightly says, he did not do—namely, for making some alteration in the detail of a rifle in contradiction to the view of the Military Authorities. We all remember perfectly well that a few years ago one of the greatest complaints made by soldiers at that time was that they had too little control over the weapons put into the hands of the Army. I certainly thought a good deal of that complaint was well founded. Now no such complaint can be made. Now the primary responsibility for the weapons of the Army rests with the Army. Then my hon. Friend very naturally says that he wants responsibility a little more particularised than that. Well, Sir, the primary responsibility for recommending a new weapon rests with the Director of Artillery. He is the man who has to recommend the new weapon to his official chief. That weapon having been proposed, it comes naturally after a time before the Secretary of State for approval. If he approves that rifle and issues it to the Army, he must then assume responsibility to the House of Commons for the weapon and for its manufacture. I accept that responsibility. I do not shrink from it in

the least degree. That responsibility properly rests on me, and I hope the House of Commons will not deprive me of that responsibility, because I am confident—at any rate, so far as I am concerned, I have undertaken it in a serious spirit—that I have done my utmost to acquaint myself with every detail connected with this rifle, and I am prepared, not only in consequence of recommendations made to me by my military advisers, but also in consequence of the very careful examination I have given to the subject, entirely to endorse their opinion, and to accept that responsibility.

[§ MR. HANBURY](#)

Leaving the Director of Artillery responsible to the Secretary of State?

[§ MR. E. STANHOPE](#)

Certainly. Now, Sir, let me state first of all the argument I propose to address to the House. I hope to be able to argue that this rifle has been chosen with the greatest care, [1658](#) and after full deliberation, that it is undoubtedly the best rifle that could have been chosen at the time it was chosen, and that at the present time it is a thoroughly good rifle for its purpose, if not absolutely the best rifle that could at this moment be chosen. How was this rifle chosen? A Committee was appointed in 1883. That Committee sat during two or three years, and was re-appointed, with one or two changes, in 1886, and examined every rifle that was submitted to them by any inventor who was willing to produce a rifle and submit it to the Committee. I do not think there was any rifle mentioned up to the last year or two that was not fully considered by the Committee, and on which they did not express a complete and absolute opinion. I was not the Secretary of State who appointed that Committee, even in its original or in its later form. What I did was this: I found the Committee ready constituted, and I thought it possible they might require the assistance of a manufacturer of rifles—an expert in that sense, who would advise them on questions of detail; and, therefore, about a year before this particular rifle was adopted for use in the Service, I appointed Mr. Rigby, a Dublin gunmaker and a man of great experience—the best man upon whom I could lay my hand—to assist the Committee in their choice of a rifle. As I am not responsible for that Committee, I think the House will allow me to say what I think about it. I believe, Sir, there could not have been, on the whole, a better Committee chosen. The points which had to come under the survey of the Committee were various, and, in my opinion, it would have been impossible to constitute a Committee for that purpose that would have satisfied everybody. There were upon this Committee three distinguished officers who had given special attention to this subject—General Philip Smith, Colonel Slade, now the head of the Musketry School at Hythe, and Colonel Tongue, at that time the head of the School at Hythe—and my dear and lamented friend Guy Dawnay, who thoroughly understood what was required in a sporting rifle, and had given great attention to military rifles. He gave up all his time and some of his holidays for the work that was being carried on by the [1659](#) Committee. Then there was Captain Meryon of the Royal Navy, who brought before the Committee the requirements of that branch of the Service, and whose valuable services every member of the Committee would, I am sure, readily acknowledge. That being so, the Committee, having examined every rifle that came before it, presented its Report in 1888. The result of that Report was that 350 rifles were manufactured and issued for trial in various directions. Some were sent to India, some to Egypt, some to Canada. Extensive trials were made, and it was

some time before the Reports came in. I should like the House to consider what our position then was. We were being pressed on every hand. Everyone will remember what took place at that time, and how we were being pressed on all hands. Pressure was put on me in the House of Commons, and I was asked to explain why the War Office were not ready to produce a magazine rifle. The Press were unanimous in saying that if foreign countries had a magazine rifle, they wanted to know why we should not have one, too. Among these journals was one to which I should like to refer specially, as it has taken a very prominent part recently on this subject—I mean the Times newspaper. Everyone will remember the character of the criticism which the Times has lately been passing on what we have done. They have said that the rifle has been hastily chosen, that no magazine rifle is needed at all, that the rifle chosen is a bad rifle, and they also say, without any disguise, that they desire to advocate another rifle designed by Major Godsal. Let me quote a passage from an article in the Times, of September 4th, 1888, the whole of which is well worth reading— How necessary it is that no undue or avoidable delay should occur in the issue of repeating rifles to the British Army is proved by the almost universal adoption by Continental Powers of such a weapon. And then, after referring to the difficulty about ammunition, it goes on— In other respects the Committee have reason to congratulate themselves and the Army, for they have devised a weapon which, take it all round, is probably superior to any other rifle yet adopted. ... It may be hoped that the authorities will lay to heart the following sentence from Colonel Slade's Report:— 'Perfection and finality are unattainable in military weapons, and, as the question has been so [1660](#) thoroughly threshed out and considered from every point of view, any further delay in issuing the new arm is very much to be deprecated. With that extract I leave the criticism of the Times. I come back to the position of the Small Arms Committee. Can it be said by anyone that the trials of the new rifle were inadequate? The trials were carried out in every climate and under every contingency, as the following statement fully showed:— The trials were of the most exhaustive nature, both by the Committee and by the troops. Thousands of rounds were fired rapidly to test the action and the barrel, until in some cases the sights were melted off. The rifles were left loaded on the grass in the winter for 14 days and nights and then fired successfully; they were dropped heavily scores of times on the stones, dropped from a height, sunk in the water, exposed to a sandblast, and passed successfully through the severe test of firing cartridges purposely made defective—a test which proved fatal to nearly every rifle that was submitted for trial to the Committee; in fact, the Committee utterly failed in their efforts to break down the rifle. The Reports received of the trials in various parts of the world were so favourable as regards the suitability of the new arm as a military weapon that all doubts, if any existed, were removed. Accordingly, the famous meeting of November 1, 1888, was held in my room at the War Office. We had before us all the Reports upon this rifle, and every member of the Committee and every person concerned unanimously expressed the opinion that the manufacture of the new rifle may be safely proceeded with. And the manufacture has accordingly been proceeded with. Various changes were no doubt made—changes which increased the strength, the stability, and the simplicity of the new rifle—and it was issued last year for trial by the Army at large. Exception is taken to my having placed this rifle, which is a more complicated weapon than the Martini-Henry, in the hands of recruits. But I did so purposely, because to do so would, I thought, afford the best test— because if it passed such a test it would be all the more satisfactory, and because in the hands of recruits faults might perhaps be discovered which, when so discovered, might be remedied. The weapon was tried by an enormous number of

persons in all parts of the country, especially at Aldershot, and the result of all the Reports has been that not one of my advisers has been shaken in his [1661](#) opinion of this weapon. No doubt the trials showed certain defects on some particular points which could be remedied, but they confirmed the opinion that the weapon was a good one, which could be made thoroughly satisfactory. I received only this morning a letter from a gentleman whose name I cannot give, as I have not had time to communicate with him and obtain his permission, but who, I may say, is one of the best shots in England connected with the Volunteer Service. He puts the case very well. He says— The difficulty of the position is this—that neither ordinary M.P.'s, nor newspaper writers, nor the public can be in any sense judges. The questions are of two kinds—mechanical and military. There are few men in the country who combine knowledge of these two sides of the subject sufficiently to be fair critics. The ammunition troubles have been unfortunate. When they are solved I have every confidence that we shall possess a rifle second to none in the world as a military arm. I may also refer to the opinion of the Director General of Ordnance Factories, who is not himself interested in this rifle, it having been approved by his predecessor. Mr. Anderson tells us he is satisfied it is "a thoroughly good arm, and one that will give complete satisfaction to the Army." Then we are told it must be a very bad rifle because we have introduced what is called "Mark II;" that is to say, because we think that there are sufficient good improvements suggested to justify us in issuing a new mark rifle. I think we should be foolish if we did not avail ourselves of experience gained in many parts of the world—foolish if we did not take advantage of most valuable suggestions in respect to the magazine rifle. This is the reason why we are trying "Mark II." It holds more cartridges, and is more easily loaded. On the whole, we think that when we have thoroughly tested it this will be the best rifle we can supply to our troops. But we have not therefore withdrawn our confidence from "Mark I." That will be used during the coming year, and I have the strongest belief that the trials of "Mark I" will command the confidence of the country. It is said the rifle is a complicated one, but so are all magazine rifles. The German rifle, to which some reference has been made, is much more complicated than any single shooter, and [1662](#) so is the French rifle, but if you eliminate the parts connected with the magazine from the other parts, you will find then that the rifle has very little more complication than the Martini-Henry even at the present time. Let me come to some of the objections urged to this rifle. The right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Marjoribanks) has urged certain objections in detail, which I am sure the House has heard with great respect. He has had the advantage of using the rifle we were perfectly ready to lend him for personal experiment, but we asked him to communicate to us the results of the trials he made. Unfortunately he did not make his Report until after the criticisms in the Times appeared, but there are passages in his Report which I should like to read to the House. The right hon. Gentleman says— I have tried the rifle, and made good practice on both occasions. I was especially struck with the even results obtained as to elevation, which was well maintained, even when the rifle was hot and dirty. My experience of 110 rounds is there was no stripping of bullets, and no single wild shot, while the mechanism worked well. Therefore, so far as that Report is concerned, we have no reason to be dissatisfied. Now, I come to some of the objections in detail. Objection has been taken with regard to the small bore, and in regard to the bolt, and on that subject I have not a single word to add to the admirable remarks of the hon. Gentleman who spoke last. He spoke with an authority on the subject to which I cannot pretend; but I should like to add that if it be said by the right hon. Gentleman on the one side that the small bore is objectionable, and that the bolt system is not so

good as the drop-block system, then, on the other side, we have uniform European experience and the universal adoption of small bore and of the bolt action. We arrived at the same conclusion afterwards, but we arrived at it by independent experiments and experience, and I do not think we can be very far wrong when we arrive at the same conclusion as European authorities, but by independent experiments. There is one point upon which, as the hon. Member has fairly stated, we differ from European nations, and that is in the mode of using the magazine rifle, and I do not think this point is too technical for me to attempt to explain. In the case of [1663](#) foreign nations the magazine is always in use,—that is to say, the soldier is always firing from the magazine, and when he has to re-load he has to put in a clip containing five cartridges, and cannot use his rifle as a single shooter. Now, in the action of our magazine rifles, the weapon is, until the supreme moment, used as a single shooter, and would be so used on ordinary occasions, but the moment the officers commanding may decide the time has come to bring the magazine into action, then the soldier will know that he has in his rifle 11 cartridges ready for use. With the foreign magazine rifle the soldier will not be certain when the crisis arises how many cartridges he may have in his magazine, and if they suddenly come to an end he must re-load his magazine. With our rifle a soldier knows he has 11 shots to account for the enemy, and we believe, if, as undoubtedly is the case, the morale of the soldier is largely affected by the weapon he uses, we think we have taken the best means of giving the soldier confidence in his rifle. I now touch on some of the minor defects. I may say that, undoubtedly, a good many of the mainsprings have failed. That is a defect of manufacture, and arises from the difficulty of making a large number of springs of exactly the same quality as the one turned out for pattern. The hon. Member for Galway has already pointed out that the tests applied show that more recent mainsprings are thoroughly satisfactory. It is believed we have got over the difficulty, and when anybody says that the rifles would have been put out of action by the failure of the mainsprings, I should like to say the failures were only discovered by the minute examination to which we subjected the rifles. The rifles issued last year were not left unexamined in the hands of the troops, in order that if no defects were discovered they might be considered serviceable; they were carefully examined by the inspection department, in order that the minutest defect might be discovered. Although a considerable number of the mainsprings broke at one end or the other, as a matter of fact very few of the rifles would have been put out of action. In any case, the substitution of one spring for another is an easy matter, and I am quite sure [1664](#) the matter does not operate to the disadvantage of the rifle as a useful weapon. Then there is the sight for the rifle, and this presented the greatest difference of opinion. The Committee were not all desirous of having the "Lewes" sight, but it was thought by some to be an improvement. Opinion has been divided; but, on the whole, the opinion of practical men is against the Lewes, and we accept that decision, and we shall issue the new rifle with the old form of sight. As to the bolts, some screws had undoubtedly given way under the severe trials to which they had been subjected, but I need not detain the House longer than to say we believe we have completely overcome that difficulty by substituting in the rifle of new manufacture a perfectly simple substitute for the screw where this gave way, and if "Mark II." is manufactured on a large scale, the screw will be done away with. Then, as to the magazine spring giving way on some occasions, that is a still smaller matter, easy to be remedied, and we are remedying it now. There is the extractor spring, and all I can say is our experience does not agree with what the right hon. Gentleman says. The Reports from the Army are entirely in the opposite direction—that the extractor spring does its work perfectly well. The more we try this, the more we find that the

extractor does its work well, and hardly ever needs repair. Then there is an objection I will allude to, though we have not heard it urged to-day. It is said the rifle is not easy to clean or repair. But that is not our experience. When I was at Aldershot I asked one of the armourer sergeants a question on this point, he having thousands of rifles passing through his hands. He reported that the rifle is no more difficult to clean or keep in repair than any other rifle which he had in his hands. He says— There is no more difficulty in cleaning this rifle than in cleaning any other rifle I have ever had. Now, Sir, I come to larger questions. Our difficulty with regard to these rifles has been the same as the difficulty experienced in foreign countries. First of all there is the jealousy of rival inventors; and, secondly, the defects in the ammunition. I do not hesitate to say that if our ammunition at first had been [1665](#) as good as it ought to have been, we should not have had three-fourths of the complaints that we have heard. I fully admit that the ammunition originally issued was not as good as it should have been. But I am also fairly entitled to remind the House that we have always told the House with the utmost frankness that we were not satisfied with the ammunition in its present form. There is no doubt that in our case, as in the case of foreign countries, the experimental stage as regards powder the bullets is not over altogether. But I am glad to tell the House that, so far as the compressed black powder is concerned, the ammunition we are now manufacturing is giving highly satisfactory results. We have heard of the "stripping" of bullets, but as we supply the new ammunition we do not hear this complaint repeated. We find the ammunition giving thoroughly uniform results, and are therefore under no apprehension as to the ammunition we are now able to manufacture for the rifle. But our task is not done until we are able to give ammunition charged not with compressed black powder, but also with the new smokeless powder. I am glad also to say that our experience, so far, with the new smokeless powder, which we call "cordite," has been satisfactory. Until we have received additional Reports from foreign climates, such as India and Canada and other places, we shall not be able to speak with absolute positiveness as to the keeping qualities of the powder, but it is exempt from, some of the causes of deterioration which undoubtedly exist in the case of most foreign smokeless powders. Our powder, which we shall be able to produce on a large scale in April, has given special satisfaction in the new 12-pounder gun, and in weapons of a larger calibre. Its application to the rifle has been throughout much more difficult, but for the opposite reason to that generally alleged, because the new smokeless powder gives less, instead of greater, pressure than the black powder. But we are satisfied with the experiments, and have every reason to believe that before long ammunition charged with the new smokeless powder will be issued to the troops for trial. Now I come to the question of the cost of the rifle. Of course, all magazine [1666](#) rifles must be more costly than single shooting rifles, especially in the first stage of their manufacture. Our method of calculating the cost of rifles is, that we include a sum sufficient to pay off within a small number of years the whole of the expense of the machinery we have set up for producing the rifles. This is not usually the case abroad, nor was it when the Martini-Henry was produced. The Martini-Henry was first produced on a large scale for £3 18s. 4d. In 1888–89 it cost £2 2s. 10d. The magazine rifle when first produced on a large scale at Enfield cost £5 5s.; during the current year ending on March 31st I believe the cost will turn out to be about £4.

[§ MR. HANBURY](#)

Does it include any royalty?

[§ MR. E. STANHOPE](#)

I will come to that point presently. The trade price for the rifle has been no doubt heavy, but it must be remembered that we include in our calculation the whole of the cost of the machinery laid down for the purpose of manufacturing the rifle, and in order to provide for that cost, and for a reasonable margin of profit to the trade, we allow about 15 per cent. in addition to the cost of the rifle at Enfield. But this is only to be allowed in case of the first 100,000 rifles, afterwards the matter is to be the subject of consideration. I have seen it stated by Sir Charles Dilke that the cost of the French Lebel rifle was only 20f., and the right hon. Gentleman to-night has told us that the cost is 40f. Neither of these statements, however, approximate to facts. I happened to-day to be able to get information from a source which I know to be reliable, that for the French rifles produced on a much larger scale than we are manufacturing, the average manufacturing price of 3,000,000 rifles is 52f., but in this estimate no account is taken of the cost of laying down machinery. If you take that into consideration you must add 13f. to the cost of the weapon. On the other hand, the price does include the cost of the bayonet, which is 8f. or 9f. If you deduct that, you arrive at a cost for the rifle of about 57f. But it is always difficult to make a fair comparison between the cost of a rifle in this country and the cost of a rifle abroad. The main cost of a rifle is due to the labour expended upon it, and everybody [1667](#) knows that labour in France and Germany is very much cheaper than it is here. Therefore, you will see that a magazine rifle can be made abroad at a smaller cost than in this country. Rifles similar to some of our sporting guns are sold at Liège at half the price charged for those guns in this country. Whether they are as good and reliable I will leave sportsmen to say. I have been asked about the cost of ammunition, and the right hon. Member opposite said that the cost of the ammunition for the magazine rifle will be double the cost of the ammunition for the Martini-Henry. As a matter of fact, the price per 1,000, in the case of the magazine rifles to be manufactured in the coming year, will be £6 5s., while the contract price of the Martini-Henry ammunition has been £5 15s. The comparison must be made with the solid drawn case for the Martini-Henry, not with the rolled case, which is only used for practice, not for service, and which once fired cannot be loaded a second time. For the past two years the contractor's price for the Martini-Henry ammunition has been £5 15s., so that the cost for the new ammunition is far from being double. Undoubtedly the new ammunition is a little more expensive, but I am confident that when it comes to be produced on a large scale, and we have had a little more experience, the price will be found to be but little greater, if it is not actually less, than the cost of the Martini-Henry ammunition. The right hon. Gentleman has also called attention to the fact that patents have been taken out by Mr. Speed, who is in Government employment, in respect to the inventions made by him in connection with the magazine rifle. It may therefore be well if I explain shortly to the House the law with regard to this matter, and the position of men employed in the Government service. The matter was fully considered by the House in 1883, and at that time, although the War Office urged strong objections to that course, it was decided that patents should have effect against the Crown, and a provision to that effect was inserted in the [Patents Act](#) for 1883, with the addition that the Government might use any invention on terms to be fixed by the Treasury. In the same year a series of conferences began between the Admiralty, the War Office, [1668](#) the Board of Trade, and the General Post Office, to consider the effect of this Act upon the Government service, and it was decided to allow Crown servants to patent because, in consequence

of the Act of 1883, they would have a very strong inducement to patent, and, if not allowed, would patent indirectly, or would leave the service, and also because it was desirable to encourage inventions, but not by promotion in the service. Regulations were accordingly settled by the Law Officers of the day and made public. Under these regulations Mr. Speed and others have been allowed to take out several patents connected with the magazine rifle. Mr. Speed has not received from the Government any remuneration or royalty in respect of his inventions, some of which have no doubt been adopted, though all may not be the subject of valid patents. Any remuneration which may be paid to Mr. Speed will be assessed in accordance with the regulations, which lay down that regard is to be had to any facilities in working out and perfecting the inventions or improvements which the inventor may have enjoyed by reason of his official position. Certainly, so far as I can judge, and without admitting the validity of any patent, more than one of his inventions is of great value to the public service, and it is impossible to say that any mischief has resulted from the encouragement which has been given to him and to others to suggest improvements. But I will frankly admit to the House that my experience generally in this matter leads me to doubt whether the deliberate policy of 1883 was a wise one. There are, of course, special difficulties attending the opposite course; and, upon the whole, I incline to the opinion that the best system would be to allow the patent to be taken out, but to require it to be assigned to the Government. This was the plan adopted in the case of the new smokeless powder, when Sir F. Abel and Professor Dewar patented their invention, and immediately assigned the patent to me. I have accordingly asked the other Departments of State interested in this matter to agree to a renewal of the Conferences of 1883, with the view of considering whether any alterations should be made in the regulations in the interest of the Public Service.

1669

§ MR. MARJORIBANKS

How about the royalties?

§ MR. E. STANHOPE

Mr. Speed gets no royalties from the Government, either at Enfield or at Birmingham. If hon. Members wish to ask further questions I shall be glad, with the permission of the House, to answer them; but I believe that I have now dealt, so far as can be in this House, with all the points that have been raised. Two of the previous speakers have referred in strong terms to what they call the system of Army administration, and they have urged that certain changes are requisite which were recommended by the Commission presided over by Lord Hartington. I have nothing to add to what I said to the House on that subject beyond this—that anyone who reads the Report of Lord Hartington's Commission will see that, whereas now the responsibility for choosing new weapons for the Army rests primarily with the Director of Artillery, so with the system recommended by Lord Hartington's Commission, the primary responsibility rests precisely in the same quarter. I think I have touched on the question of responsibility in a manner that can leave no doubt in the minds of hon. Members. We have not the least hope of satisfying rival inventors. We expected a good deal of outside criticism. If anyone will take the trouble to read the volume of Hansard which records the Debate on the Martini-Henry rifle, he will find that every single objection which is made against this weapon was made against the Martini-Henry. We were

told that the Snider was the best weapon in the world, and that there was no confidence to be placed in the Committee that tested the Martini-Henry. We were told also that every portion of the rifle was patched up and made to look its best, whereas it was very bad. We were told that it was going to be an excessively costly weapon; but we have lived through those fearful predictions, and I believe that we shall live through the fearful predictions that are now made about this weapon. I have never pretended that this rifle is a perfect weapon. No magazine rifle in existence is a perfect weapon, and I do not think that any rifle is a perfect weapon. All that we can do is to make the improvements in it that experience suggests, in spite of the unfair conclusions [1670](#) which are being drawn every day from the fact of altering even the smallest detail of the rifle originally proposed; and we are confident, even as it is, that we are putting into the hands of the troops a weapon which has been most carefully selected, which has been most exhaustively tried, and which time will prove to be thoroughly suited to all the wants and requirements of the service.

§ (7.7.) [MAJOR RASCH](#)

I will not detain the House for more than a moment or two, but I should like to say why I seconded the Amendment of my hon. Friend (Mr. Hanbury). The right hon. Gentleman opposite seems to be of opinion that to the Secretary of State for War responsibility in the matter of the momentous changes which have been made should be brought home, and if not to him to somebody else. The right hon. Gentleman did not seem to think so on the 15th November, when he wrote to the Times, stating that no weight could be attached to the opinions of the Secretary of State, and even now I fail to understand whether the responsibility is to rest on the shoulders of General Alderson or on those of the Secretary for War. If the strictures of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Berwickshire are correct, it is in his judgment necessary that the responsibility should be brought home to some one, because the public will ask that the blame shall be laid at somebody's door for the rifle which has been brought out. It is very difficult for me to attempt to criticise the extremely technical though interesting speech of the hon. and gallant Gentleman the Member for Galway (Colonel Nolan). The hon. and gallant Member is well known and respected in the Army as the inventor of the range finder, but as the Financial Secretary to the War Office, in an answer to a question of mine the other day, stated that 2,000 magazine rifles will be issued weekly, I should like to know whether the hon. Gentleman will give the House a little more information on one or two rather important points. It is stated, and I believe correctly, that owing to the weakness in the breech-block there is a certain tendency to jam. We had enough of that sort of thing in the Soudan in connection with the machine guns. Then the extractor is said by those who have had experience [1671](#) of the new arm at Aldershot to be weak and inefficient, and in order to bring it into play it is necessary to use force. I admit that the reduction in the bore and in the weight of the bullet is in favour of the new rifle. The Secretary for War states—and, of course, I am compelled to accept his statement—that the reduction in the bore does not increase the tendency to strip. I am told that it does do so, and that it makes the bullet leave the muzzle of the rifle a shapeless mass, so that it is impossible to have good shooting. As to the sight, I am told that no allowance has been made for windage, and this in a rifle sighted for 3,000 yards. I should like to know whether it is the fact that the Government of Victoria have, after inspecting the rifle, refused it, and that the Government of India have also refused it; and whether Papers will be laid on the Table having reference to an order by the Indian Government for 70,000 of these

rifles. The Secretary for War alluded to the Report of September 5, and to the inability of the Committee to break down the rifle after repeated trials, but if the right hon. Gentleman will go down to Aldershot he will find that Tommy Atkins has broken it down very completely with his unaided ingenuity, and that something like 40 per cent. of the weapons in the hands of the troops have been sent back to the Sparkbrook factory, at Birmingham, for repairs. Yet the Report stated that the rifle was practically perfect. Sir Redvers Buller also said in November last year that the rifle was a good one, and on that statement the Secretary for War said that practically it was the best of rifles. In December Sir Redvers Buller admitted that, after all, he did not know much about it, so that I think the Committee have, to some extent, stultified themselves. What is wanted for rough work in the field is simplicity, strength, and cheapness; and I do not think that this new rifle combines those qualities. The shooting with it has been unsatisfactory, and the mechanism has been perpetually breaking down. I do not wish to trouble the House any further, and I should not have ventured to make these observations had I not noticed in the Times of this morning a statement to the effect that military Members always address the House on such subjects as [1672](#) increase of pay, but that when anything comes to the front concerning the efficiency of the Army they usually hold their tongues.

§ (7.14.) [MR. SETON KARR \(St. Helens'\)](#)

As the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War has invited questions, I should like to know, in the first place, how many shots he has had fired out of one rifle? I put the question, because the method of manufacturing the bullet adopted in connection with this rifle is an entirely new one, a distinct innovation on all previous methods. The bullet consists of a metal cover, encasing a leaden core. I should like to know the result on the rifling of shooting 2,000 or 3,000 rounds out of this magazine rifle, because I believe that the shield covering the bullet is liable to be stripped off—as a result, the bullet leaving the muzzle of the gun in a shapeless mass. But there is another danger. Supposing the shield should stop in the rifle, I believe that an inevitable result would be that the rifle would burst. If the rifling is not hard enough to pare off the shield of the bullet it will get worn out in something like 1,000 rounds. These considerations make me most anxious to know whether the right hon. Gentleman has had a sufficient test made of the rifle. To my mind, the only good test would be to have some of the rifles fired 5,000 or 6,000 times. We cannot place too much importance upon this point. Then, as to the trajectory, I think the hon. Member for Galway has attached too much importance to the new rifle in this respect, and I venture to doubt the accuracy of the hon. Member's figures, having taken some interest in this matter for 18 years, and being somewhat conversant with the trajectory of firearms, especially of sporting rifles. Although the question is of more importance in modern rifles as compared with the obsolete weapon of many years ago, at any rate it is not of such importance as the hon. and gallant Member would have the House believe. It seems to me of great importance if the flatness of the trajectory is to do away with the elevated sight. In the case of the Army rifle, we cannot do away with the elevated sight, although we can in the case of sporting rifles, which are only intended to carry 200 yards. In the case of the [1673](#) sporting rifle, the trajectory is very flat, consequently the elevated sight is not required, the trajectory dropping in the case of the "Express" rifle from 10 to 12 inches. However, I do not attach so much importance to this as to the stripping of the bullet and the wearing out of the rifle. But there is one other question to which I wish to ask the attention of the Secretary for

War. I desire to know what arrangements are being made for giving a variety in the length of the stock of the new rifle. We have heard a great deal about the necessity of Tommy Atkins having confidence in the weapon which is placed in his hands, and I should like to point out that nothing more disturbs the confidence of the soldier than the kicking of his rifle. It disturbs his shooting, and makes young troops almost afraid to shoot. It seems to me that one of the best ways to get over the difficulty will be, to get rid of the present improper fitting of the stock. It does not matter how short, or how tall, how thin, or how stout the soldier is, all have served out to them the same rifle; at any rate, so far as I have been able to learn there are only two sizes, and we should have at least three sizes. Soldiers are simply useless if they do not have a good rifle. I came into the House to-day with the intention of supporting the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Berwickshire, but, after having listened to the speech of the Secretary for War, I do not intend to do that. I do trust, however, that the Secretary for War will reply to these and other questions put to him, and will take care to have every test applied to this rifle that any human being can suggest.

§ (7.23.) [*SIR W. BARTELOT*](#) (Sussex, N.W.)

I desire to say a few words on this which seems to me one of the most important questions which can be brought before the House. I may say I am very glad the Motion has been brought forward in so moderate a manner as to show that the question is not in any sense one of Party. What we all desire, and the point to which we should all direct our attention, is to secure that the rifle used by our troops shall be the best that can possibly be procured. My right hon. Friend, in his most able and exhaustive statement, has shown us that the various parts of this rifle are of [1674](#) the best quality that can be obtained, and that the appliances are the most useful that can be given to the soldier. I would ask him, if this magazine rifle is so excellent in every way as he states, why not put it to a practical test? In the spring of the present year an expedition of 7,000 or 8,000 men will be marching in India, and part of this force might be armed with the new rifle, so that it can be seen how it answers in the field. It is true, as the right hon. Gentleman has pointed out, that there were many complaints when the Martini-Henry rifle was adopted, but the result was that there were no fewer than six classes of the rifle issued, and not one of them, except the first, was at all like the original pattern. When things of this kind occur we are driven to the conclusion that there must be some mistake in the way rifles are chosen a pattern sealed, and which pattern has to be repeatedly improved at very great cost. Looking at the fact that you now have the same sort of Committee that you had when the Martini-Henry was adopted—I am not saying or going to say one word against any member of that Committee, only against the system on which that Committee works, the Committee not being a Judicial Committee, as I think it should be, but a Constructive Committee as well—I would ask why, when the Committee had chosen the Lee rifle, the Secretary of State did not insist that any alterations which were necessary should be made by the inventor himself? Absolute power is given to the Committee, and they, with Enfield at their backs, spend as much as they please in experiments, and the country has to pay for all their failures. I have always thought that the sooner Enfield is abolished the better will it be for the taxpayers. It is too close to London. There is as good a factory as can be desired in Birmingham, where coal and iron can be obtained much cheaper than at Enfield, and where, when it is necessary to discharge men, they can at once find employment. The right hon. Gentleman says that the Director General of Artillery is solely responsible for the rifle. What, then, of the Committee

who manipulates the rifle? Are they re- [1675](#) sponsible, or are they not? If they are not, they should not have charge of the experiments. I should like to hear what the right hon. Gentleman has to say on this point, as I think it is a very serious one. I do not disguise my opinion on the matter—I never have done so. It is in the Report of the Commission, of which Sir James FitzJames Stephen was Chairman, that we ought to have an Ordnance Department; and I hold that until we have such a Department we shall never feel secure that we have the best arm in the world. Take care that you do not have amongst your warlike stores arms of different patterns for the Army and the Navy, so that when an emergency arises you do not find yourselves in a dangerous position. It is all-important, as to this arm, that we should have one authority dealing with it, and that an authority responsible to the House. To turn to another point, we have at last copied the bolt-action from foreign nations. English gunmakers are the best in the world; and surely the right hon. Gentleman will not say that if the Government had applied to them for the invention of a block action to suit the magazine rifle instead of a bolt action the required action could not have been obtained. We have also, in my humble judgment, reduced too far the rim of the bore. The hon. and gallant Member for Galway says that the bullets will not strip if a piece of dirty oiled rag is drawn down the barrel of the rifle after the first shot. But how can the soldier go through this process in face of the enemy?

[§ COLONEL NOLAN](#)

I said a piece of dirty rag might be used, or the soldier might produce the same effect by breathing down the barrel.

[§ SIR W. BARTTELOT](#)

The first thing the soldier thinks of is the enemy. He concentrates his attention upon the enemy, and has no time to think of a piece of dirty rag. When an examination of the rifle was accorded the other day, I saw the process of cleaning with the apparatus carried in the stock of the weapon. Though this apparatus was easily taken out, I was assured by the officer in charge that a considerable time was required for restoring it; and I am certain that under these conditions nine soldiers out of ten would lose the cleaning apparatus. [1676](#) We want the most simple rifle that can be found for the class of soldiers we have at the present day. Look at the men of the Reserve and the recruits, and just see the condition they are in with regard to rifle instruction, and especially with regard to this new magazine rifle. Look at the regiments at home, even those in the First Army Corps, and see how you have to send out your best men when they are wanted for service in India or in the Colonies. The right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War says it is the best rifle that can be produced. I hope it may be so, but when I looked at the rifle for the first time I thought it one of the most complicated machines I had ever seen. I found that it contained no less than 24 screws, and that in all those screws the threads were different, so that if the rifle wanted to be repaired abroad it would be almost impossible to do it, inasmuch as the screws are not interchangeable. There is another point on which I wish to say a word: I have spoken of the breach action of this-weapon. I do not like that action; I believe it to be constructed on a mistaken principle because of its want of strength. But all this has been so clearly shown by the right hon. Gentleman opposite that I will not go further into it. But in regard to the ammunition we are not at all certain about it. It is cased either in nickel, iron, or steel, and the twist in the barrel is increased to give the

elongated bullet the necessary impetus. The result is that the bullet is stripped, and damage is likely to arise to the rifling of the barrel. These are serious difficulties with a new rifle. I should have thought you would have taken care not only to have perfect ammunition, but also perfect powder; but I am told that, notwithstanding what the right hon. Gentleman has said, and of course I accept his word, the black powder used is not all that can be desired. It may be good enough at home, but we may have to use the rifle in all parts of the world, and we ought to have no doubt about the quality of the powder to be employed. With regard to the question of responsibility, we ought certainly to know absolutely on whom the responsibility rests. The hon. Member for Preston has talked of wanting to hang somebody for the mistakes that are [1677](#) made. My right hon. Friend the Secretary for War has told us that when he orders the issue of the rifles he will be responsible to this House. No doubt that is so, but you cannot make him responsible for the rifle itself. The Director General of Artillery is said to be the man who is absolutely responsible; but I ask the House, could we do anything with that officer supposing this rifle were to fail? I am sorry my right hon. Friend opposite has asked for a Royal Commission, because I do not think a Royal Commission the right thing. I should have preferred a Committee of this House, not to take away responsibility from the Secretary for War, but to examine thoroughly into the whole question, and report as soon as possible in order to allay the feeling existing in the country upon this matter. That feeling, as my hon. Friend knows, does exist, and may be communicated to our soldiers themselves. A more disastrous thing than that could hardly be imagined. I hope my right hon. Friend will intimate his intention to propose such a Committee, so that it may report upon this rifle, and say whether we have the best rifle or not. If it is not, we should stop its manufacture; but if it is the best, its issue could be continued, and we should feel that we had done our best to allay the feeling which exists outside this House.

§ (7.36.) [CAPTAIN BOWLES \(Middlesex, Enfield\)](#)

I merely wish to say a very few words in answer to the remarks of the last speaker in regard to the Enfield Factory. The matter is one on which we ought to consider proofs rather than individual opinions. We know that rifles have been manufactured at Enfield, the cost and workmanship of which compare favourably with those manufactured at Birmingham; and with regard to the setting up of manufactories at Birmingham and other large towns, I think we ought to rejoice at seeing the Government factory set up at a place like Enfield, where the artisans can enjoy healthy exercise and country air. I think that the question as to whether this rifle is a good one, or the best that can be made, is one that ought to be left to military experts. I think the case is one in which individual opinions are of very little importance, because we do [1678](#) not know the circumstances under which they were arrived at. These individuals may have tried the rifle, but we do not know the particular tests applied, and, for my part, I would rather have the opinion of a Committee properly appointed—such as a War Office Committee—to decide which is the best weapon, than the opinion of any person either at Aldershot or elsewhere who may not have had proper opportunity of putting the rifle to the test. As regards the trials which are made at Enfield, I believe there is no neighbourhood better suited for this purpose. I trust the right hon. Gentleman will see his way to uphold the verdict of the Small Arms Committee.

§ (7.38.) [MR. E. LEES \(Oldham\)](#)

I think the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War has successfully proved every part of the case he undertook to prove. He has shown that the Department took every possible care to ascertain which was the best rifle, that the whole subject was thoroughly considered and examined, that the Times newspaper has been most inconsistent in the way in which it has attacked him, and that in the rifle which is now served out the Army has got, at any rate, a very serviceable weapon. But he did not undertake to prove, nor did he prove, that the rifle under discussion was the best rifle of its kind now in existence, which, after all, is the point on which both the public and the Army will feel most interested, although it has been proved that it was the best in existence at the time, the Committee sat to decide as to what rifle should be adopted. Since that time, notwithstanding that the right hon. Gentleman has sneered at rival inventions, the rifle produced by Major Godsall has been found to be superior to the rifle now being issued by the Government. I should like to know from the right hon. Gentleman whether we have gone too far with the present rifle to permit of the issue of a superior weapon, if it can be shown that there is such a weapon available, as a substitute. I do not wish to insinuate that the right hon. Gentleman has not fully proved that the Committee took every possible care to see that the rifle they recommended was the best then put before them; but if it be the fact that the Godsall rifle is the [1679](#) better weapon, I should be glad if he will tell us whether it is now too late to prevent the further issue of the new rifle.

§ (7.42.) [COLONEL BLUNDELL](#) (Lancashire, S.W., Ince)

I think it is clear that, whether we have now the best rifle or not, its manufacture should be proceeded with as rapidly as possible, because it is absolutely necessary that the country should be armed with magazine rifles. What we want from the Secretary for War is an assurance that if hereafter it is found that this new rifle is not a satisfactory arm he shall not allow the prejudices of any officers to prevent our Forces from obtaining a better rifle, no matter what amount of sacrifice the renewal of machinery for that purpose would entail. I desire to add one word as to the bayonet. The bayonet attached to the new rifle is a very short one, making the rifle and bayonet 10 inches or a foot shorter than the German and French weapons. In single combat this shortness is said not to be a disadvantage, but were two ranks of men opposed I think it would be a great disadvantage.

§ (7.44.) [CAPTAIN BETHELL](#) (York, E.R., Holderness)

I should like to say a few words on the question of responsibility. The hon. Member for Preston referred pointedly to the responsibility of some person outside this House. I do not think he is either right or just in making this suggestion, because no one can have responsibility but the Secretary for War; it is he who has to approve the weapon which is issued; and whatever either the hon. Member for Preston or others may say, you may depend upon it that the House of Commons would not stop a man's pension for any mistake that may have been made in recommending a particular rifle. In point of fact, there can be no outside responsibility beyond that of the Secretary for War. I think the right hon. Gentleman is mistaken in contending that the primary responsibility rests with General Alderson or with anybody else outside this House. The ultimate responsibility rests, as I have said, with the Secretary for War, and it cannot be taken away from him except by Statute. My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Galway has spoken of two important points—first, the diminution of the

bore, which means accuracy of fire; and, secondly, the question of the magazine. For my part, I am extremely [1680](#) grateful to the hon. Member for Preston for the clear manner in which he has put his case before the House, and I think that, after his speech and that of the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War, the House will feel better satisfied with the new weapon than before this discussion commenced.

§ (8.15.) [MR. E. STANHOPE](#)

Sir, I can only say a few words, by permission of the House, in reply to the questions that have been pointedly addressed to me, and which I will endeavour to answer as briefly as possible. I have been asked how many shots have been fired out of a single rifle at the trial of the weapon. On this point I am able to reply that at one trial 16,000 shots were fired out of one rifle, and it was thought that was a sufficient test of the weapon, and that it was not necessary to test its endurance any further. My attention has also been called to the length of the stock. That undoubtedly is a point of great importance, and I should not like to express any opinion with regard to it without consulting my advisers. I have been asked whether any orders for the magazine rifle have been given by the Indian Government. I am glad to say that orders have been received from that Government for magazine rifles for the purpose of arming our troops in that country. A certain number have been supplied to the Indian Government, and next year there will be a very large further supply of the weapons sent over. As far as I know, the tests of the rifle that have been conducted in India have been uniformly successful, and the Government have accordingly continued to manufacture the new weapon. I fully admit that there have been difficulties with regard to the supply of ammunition for the new weapon in India, because, if we are going to use smokeless powder, it is important to know whether such powder is suitable for India; but Her Majesty's Government do know that they can provide ammunition that is perfectly suitable for that country, and until the adoption of smokeless powder is definitely decided upon, black powder ammunition will be issued for use in India. With regard to the stripping of bullets, the Department believe that they have entirely overcome that difficulty, although in the ammunition that was first issued the powder [1681](#) was not suitable for the bullet. I am glad to say that, as far as I know, in the new ammunition the difficulty has been overcome, and in the new ammunition no stripping of the bullet need be feared with the black powder and the improved bullet that are now used. I have been asked to give the House an assurance that we have now got the best rifle. Of course, a time must come, in making experiments with these weapons, when something like finality must be admitted, and we must accept the best rifle that can be produced at some period or another and proceed with the manufacture of it. I believe that we have got the best rifle that can be made now; but it is quite possible that three, or four, or five years hence some improvement may be devised which will leave this rifle behind in the race. I am, at all events, sure that we have the best rifle that exists for the time being. Of course, if at any future time great improvements are made in rifles, and their power is so enormously increased that it becomes necessary to introduce a new one with which to arm our Army, the whole subject will have to be gone into again. As to the bayonet, I believe that the new one is a suitable and a most satisfactory one, the Reports from the different districts being generally in favour of it. It is true that it is shorter than the old one, but every country that has adopted the magazine rifle is using a shorter bayonet. I hope that the new bayonet which has been adopted will prove a very handy weapon, and that it will not be found at all too short. The hon. and gallant Member for Sussex

has made the only really hostile speech in the course of the Debate with regard to the new rifle; but I must remind the House that the hon. and gallant Gentleman made a similar speech with regard to the Martini-Henry rifle, and I think that his present speech with regard to the new rifle will be attended with similar results to those he then experienced. The hon. and gallant Member asked me whether the expedition that is about to take place in India will not afford a good opportunity of testing the magazine rifle; but the fact is, that there is no .303 ammunition in India at the present moment. Some rifles have been issued for use in that country. Moreover, as our troops in [1682](#) India have not yet been trained and instructed in the use of the new weapon, it is quite impossible that the rifle could be issued for the purpose of an expedition that is to start next month. The hon. and gallant Gentleman made the extraordinary suggestion that the best mode of trying whether or not the rifle is a good one is to appoint a Committee of this House to examine and to decide upon it. I do not know whether hon. Members are inclined to accept such a responsibility; but even if they are so inclined, I very much doubt whether the country would consider that a Committee of this House is a proper body to decide such a question. Very few men in this House are competent to pronounce an opinion as to whether this rifle is suitable or not for the Army, although, doubtless, the hon. and gallant Member himself is one of the few who are. But, however that may be, I do not think that the decision of a Committee of this House on the question would be likely to increase the confidence of the Army or of the country in the fitness of the weapon, but, on the contrary, would be likely to decrease that confidence.

§ (7.54.) [MR. MARJORIBANKS](#)

I mean, Sir, to say a very few words in reply to one or two points raised by various speakers. The hon. Member for Preston made rather a point of the fact that this rifle has been found very successful in certain tests in Roumania, and he also inferred that the rifle had been adopted by the Roumanian Government. I have here a letter from the wife of a Minister of War in Roumania, who writes and says that her husband assures her that magazine rifle .303 will not be adopted, and I believe has not been adopted as a matter of fact. Switzerland, too, has certainly put the magazine rifle aside, and the weapon was shown to a distinguished Russian War Office official, who instantly opened the breech, twisted aside the cocking piece, and said, "We know all about that; you do not suppose we are going to adopt such a weapon as that?" My hon. Friend the Member for Galway took some exception to the remarks I made with regard to the bore of the rifle, and he expressed doubt as to using a lead bullet in a bore so small as .320 in. I said that .320 in. was the smallest bore in [1683](#) which you could use a lead bullet but I did not recommend it. My own idea is that it would be much better to have a bore of .360 in. or .380 in. With regard to the speech of the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary for War, I think it was coloured by official optimism. The right hon. Gentleman was obliged to assume the responsibility of the rifle, and naturally held it was the best possible arm. I am not surprised that he should have adopted that line of argument. I do not believe that that is the case, and that opinion I think is shared by many people outside the walls of this House. The right hon. Gentleman, in quoting the letter of a distinguished rifle shot, said the rifle was very good, if only the right ammunition was obtained; but, Sir, that is a very big "if." Having adopted this very small bore, it is exceedingly difficult to get good ammunition. You have an expensive composite bullet admittedly imperfect, and far from having got smokeless powder, you have been compelled to fall back on a

compressed pellet of black powder, which is smoky, dirty, and foul. I think it was hardly fair on the part of the right hon. Gentleman to insinuate that the letter which I wrote to the Financial Secretary on the rifle lent me by the War Office was founded on what appeared in the Times. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that my criticisms, such as they were, proceeded from my own, perhaps not too fertile, brain. He did me the honour to quote a single sentence of that letter, which suited his own purpose, but gave an utterly false idea of its general tenor. I endeavoured to say all the good I could of the rifle; I did not wish at all to take a partial or distorted view. I found that it shot very well, only that I thought the bullet was much affected by the wind. I believe that has been the experience of every one who has fired the rifle. My criticisms on its mechanism were similar to those I have now made in the House. It is perfectly true that the Martini-Henry was years ago objected to in this House on grounds in many respects like those brought forward about the new rifle to-night; especially was that the case with regard to the extractor, which was shown to work on wrong mechanical principles, [1684](#) depending on the short arm of the lever instead of the long one. The scientists on that occasion were sneered at, but in a short time they had their revenge, and full effect was given to their views by a reconstruction of the extractor. I must put the House to the trouble of a Division, because I wish to put on record that some, at any rate, do not agree that this rifle is the best possible of all rifles. I wish to put on record a protest against the decision of the Government in not allowing inquiry as to whether its breech action and various parts are founded on sound mechanical principles.

§ (8.0.) The House divided:—Ayes 74; Noes 108.—(Div. List, No. 33.)

§ Main Question, as amended, put, and agreed to. Resolved, "That it is undesirable, by the appointment of a Royal Commission inquiring into a detail of military administration, to weaken the full responsibility of the officials, specially charged with that duty, for the recommendaian d adoption of the new magazine rifle.