

militia for a number of years.

In concluding without wishing to adopt the superior and sarcastic tone of argument of "Cambridge" I would like to say in answer to the last paragraph of his letter, that in my experience in the militia, those who join (either in rural or city corps) between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one make the best militia men, are more enthusiastic and remain longer with their regiments than those who join at a later period in life. I think the best officers of the militia will agree with me as to this statement. OXFORD.

### The Pell-Mell Firing-Line.

To the Editor of the "Army and Navy Gazette."

Sir,—The question has recently been raised as to whether our present method of teaching fire-discipline is sufficient to meet the requirements of the battle-conditions of to-day. The subject is of such vital importance involving as it does in the decisive close fire-fight, that it should not be allowed to drop until the question has been thoroughly settled one way or the other. Hitherto our system of fire-discipline has gone no further than training our men to fight in distinct fire-units, so as to attain "the greatest development of Infantry-fire under the most careful supervision and control." The contention now is that this system of keeping the fire-units distinct as long as possible is all very well as far as it goes, but that it does not go far enough, in that it does not provide for the time when the "as long as possible" will have been reached. The contention is that, opposite those important points of the enemy's position selected for assault, as line after line of men is brought up into the firing line at the close ranges, the original fire-units must become mixed, and a pell-mell mixture of firers must be the result; the contention is, further, that such being the case, it is the management of such a pell-mell firing line, in the restoration of order and the control of its fire, that the task of fire-discipline really lies. Such is the conclusion to which the practical soldiers of Germany, after 23 years of reflection on the experiences of 1870, have come, and such is the task which they set their fire-discipline to achieve. The practice of the pell-mell may be seen constantly in Germany, as described in a former letter, with the result that, when the fire-units become mixed, no confusion or disorder is apparent, but the whole mixed firing line is at once subdivided again into new units, which admit of the same direction and control of fire as the original units. The reason why our system of fire-discipline has hitherto gone no further than the elementary principle of keeping the original fire-units distinct as long as possible, appears to be as follows. Since the introduction of extended order as the fighting formation of Infantry, we

have had no experience of European warfare; we have only practised it on the parade ground, on peaceful field days, and against barbarians. Consequently it has not been brought home to us what must happen when the firing line is checked, perhaps for hours, as frequently happened in 1870. In peacetime, when the second line arrives at the firing line, as there is no hail of bullets to stop its further progress, it can at once advance to the assault, or the "cease fire" sounds, consequently we have not had to fight for hours with the first and second lines intermingled. But suppose an action against European troops armed with smokeless low trajectory magazine rifles. Suppose that as the second line arrives, reinforcements also arrive for the enemy, whose consequently increased fire-resistance beats back any attempt to gain further ground for the present, and forces the first and second lines to fight on intermingled as one firing line. Can anyone, after reading the records of 1870, assert that such will not often be the case. Suppose that further reinforcements reached the intermingled firing-line, which enables further ground to be gained indeed, but still does not enable the enemy's fire-resistance to be broken down sufficiently for the position to be assaulted. Many instances could be quoted from 1870, to show that this also was often the case. And what was the case in 1870 must also be the case in the coming war, for improved rifles have not made the attack across the last 500 yards any easier. Must we not therefore prepare for the consequences of the firing-line being brought to a standstill for a considerable time, for experience proves that it frequently will be brought to a standstill. We cannot suppose that we shall be able to carry out an attack in battle as we carry one out on a parade ground, without checks. After we have arrived at the "first parallel," further progress will be the slow outcome of a protracted fire-fight, during which such reinforcements as arrive, unable yet to advance further, must necessarily be intermingled with the troops already in the firing-line. What else can happen? Let anyone who doubts think it out for himself. Let him imagine a firing-line checked; let him imagine himself coming up with reinforcements and finding the ground in front swept by so hot a fire that an attempt to advance further is beaten back—what can he do but double up his men with the troops already there; let him imagine further reinforcements being sent up, in order to break down this fire resistance; what can they do but rush up and throw themselves down intermingled pell-mell with those already there. How are we to reduce such a pell-mell to order, for reduced to order it must be. If the further attack is to have any force. Manifestly we can only learn how to reduce it to order by having learnt how to

do so through previous training in peace-time. We officers therefore want plenty of practice in the pell-mell so that we may be able to reduce it to order with the ease of habit; and our men want plenty of practice, so that they may not be astounded by the confusion around, but may know exactly what to do and what commands to expect. The object of this letter is not, however, to enter into the details of practising the pell-mell, which have been already pointed out in a former letter, but merely to show that its practice is necessary; that the reason why we have not practised it hitherto is because, in our peaceful exercises, our firing-line has never yet been checked, and our second line has never yet been unable to pass on to the assault; and that therefore the necessity of practising the first and second lines in fighting on intermingled together has never yet been strongly brought home to us. Our system of fire-discipline is excellent so far as it goes, that is to say, for the first advance as far as the "first parallel;" but it is incomplete, in that it makes no provision for the firing-line being brought to a standstill for a considerable time somewhere about the "first parallel," and for the reduction to order and control of the pell-mell firing-line, which must form the fighting formation thence and onwards.

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### Sir Fred. Middleton's Suppression of Rebellion in the North-West Territories of Canada, 1885.

By General Sir Fred. Middleton.

Reprint from the United Service Magazine.

The short campaign in the North-West Territories of Canada in 1885 against the rebel French half-breeds and Indians under Riel was remarkable as having been carried out solely by colonial militia, who had never seen a shot fired in anger, without the presence of any of the regulars of the mother country, except the General Officer commanding, his Aide-de-camp, and a few others. It is true a small part of the force employed consisted of some of what is called the "Permanent Militia"—regularly enlisted men, who can compare favorably with our regulars—but the main part of the force consisted of the ordinary militia of the country, men who had some of them undergone the usual militia training, some of them having not even had that. These men had all been suddenly called from the desk, the store, the plough, and other civil avocations, to take up arms against a far distant enemy, who bore the character of being wily and brave, perfect bush-fighters, and good shots. That these sons of Canada did their duty when thus called upon will, I trust, be made clear in the following short account of the campaign.

I do not propose entering into the causes of the rising, and though the movements of the different columns were all made under my directions and orders, I shall confine myself principally to the relation of the movements and actions of the column