

## BISLEY COMMON.

The opinion of that veteran rifleman, Captain Cortis, on any matter affecting shooting must necessarily carry a good deal of weight; his impressions, therefore, of Bisley Common, as expressed at a recent dinner, at Arundel, are worth reproducing. In reference to his having visited Bisley, in company with Sir Henry Fletcher, Captain Cortis said he believed it would be impossible to find any range in England superior to Wimbledon, but he was most favourably impressed with that at Bisley. It was a fine honest range, a more honest range possibly than Wimbledon, and one where the shooting would be more even, and without so much "fluking." It also appeared to be suitable for camping, having a covering of stunted heather such as was seen on the Yorkshire Moors. Captain Cortis does not think that any inconvenience will be experienced from the sand, about which much misgiving has been expressed.

## HYTHE SPECIAL VOLUNTEER COURSE.

Last week saw the very necessary, but at the same time somewhat monotonous exercise of "position" drill concluded, and the commencement of "class" firing. Ten rounds at 200 yards were first allowed as practice to "sight" the rifles, and after that, by degrees, the 3rd, 2nd and 1st classes, as practised by volunteers, were the orders of the day. Though on some occasions the light was good, the wind was invariably contrary, being that known to shootists as a "fish-tail" one, and that, too, from the front. The consequence was that men who for years had been marksmen found the conditions of weather, unknown rifle, etc., too much for them, whilst the highest aggregate scores made by the first four marksmen were 187 to Mellish, 175 to Freemantle and Moore; and the crack shot and popular right wing instructor, Captain Bagnall, though used to the ranges, only succeeded in putting on 174.

In connection with this shoot was knocked up an amusing auction and selling sweepstakes, the tickets being 2s. 6d. each, and some 150 being issued. Mellish went at auction for 21s. 6d., and as the first prize was £18, the purchaser found his market; whilst Bagnall who fetched £3. 10s., coming in fourth, left his purchaser in the unenviable position of getting nothing for his money.

On Saturday a great "International" shoot—being eight representatives from England, Scotland and Ireland—was shot with the new magazine rifle. As the Irish were numerically weak, the conditions of service were modified by their eligibility being tested by the quantity of "Irish" they had imbibed in times past and present. Whether the latter had anything to do with the shoot cannot be stated, but the team came in third with 531, whilst Scotland headed the list with 622, and England made 590—seven rounds at 200, 500 and 600 yards, Wimbledon scoring. It is probably not generally known that an entirely new sight has been adopted for the magazine rifle; and taking this into consideration, and that the competitors had never handled their individual rifles before, the score may be regarded as fairly successful; Captain Stead, of the English team, who had been unsuccessful as a marksman, putting on the top total for England of 90, whilst the best score of the whole teams was put on by Major Harley, the D.A.A.G., who amassed 92. On the completion of the match, the captain of the Scotch team said it was quite evident his men could fire with a rifle unknown to them and with novel sights, so that *when* the magazine is issued to the volunteers, he thought the Irish should be supplied first, and then the English, to give them a chance of a little practice, to put them on an equality with their Scotch brethren.

In addition to the range practice, judging distance by sound, and volleys with "blank" were again repeated, and "communicating" drill commenced, with lectures on the methods of keeping musketry returns; also drill with machine-guns and private practice with the new magazine rifle, finishing up with volleys at 300, 400, 600 and 800 yards, and the use of range-finders.

The individual comfort of every officer attending the course has been the unceasing care of the much-respected adjutant Captain Murphy, whilst their scientific education has been ably supervised by Colonel Burton, the chief instructor; and notwithstanding the arduous duties of the commandant, Colonel Tongue, in connection with the musketry of the whole English army, he has found time to perfect a grand improvement in the Slade-Wallace equipment, so far as the carrying of ammunition is concerned. We shall deal with the subject specially later on; at present suffice it to say that it does away completely with the cumbersome pouches on each side of the waist-belt, and enables 100 rounds of ball to be carried *round the waist* without the soldier being sensibly aware of the weight he is carrying. The manufacture of these waist bandoliers, so to speak, is in itself a marvel, not a single stitch being in the whole affair, the webbing material being woven throughout. It is unquestionably a great improvement on the belt and pouches, and used in conjunction with the other Slade-Wallace parts, is about the finest thing we have yet seen in the matter of the soldier's equipment.—*United Service Gazette, 28th December.*

## THE NEW RIFLE.

As a result of the suddenly-arrived-at decision to issue the new magazine rifle at once to the infantry troops of the Aldershot division, the infantry armourers of the camp have been undergoing a course of training at Enfield, to qualify themselves to fit, change and repair the various parts of the new weapon and its magazine. The ammunition to be served out with the rifle of the future is, however, not the cartridge of the future, the final decision in respect to the components and construction of the latter having yet to be arrived at. As yet only 200 rounds per rifle are to be issued for experimental practice, the powder being of the black kind, instead of the brown and smokeless compound which in theory is, some day, to supersede all other.

## Rifle Shooting Matches, Past vs. Present.

[By an Old-time Volunteer.—In Volunteer Record.]

Only those old volunteers whose energy in the cause has kept them in the ranks for upwards of the past eighteen years or so, can fully appreciate without explanation the distinction in all its bearings conveyed by the above title. Strange although it may at first appear, the main differences which are decidedly for the worst are caused by the introduction of the improved breech-loading firearms which have done so much in altering the conditions of modern warfare; but let us explain our meaning.

The ordinary rifle shooting of the present day must be pretty familiar to all. Squads of a small number of men are formed to shoot at different hours to suit each other's convenience as far as possible. When the appointed hour arrives, the men are called up in pairs to the front, and firing alternate shots, get off their allotted number of rounds in about a quarter of an hour. If it is only a single range competition, *i.e.*, completed at one distance, the great majority of the competitors hurry off to catch the next train back to business, and are seen no more that day, having only been perhaps half an hour upon the range. If, however, the competition is carried over more than one distance, a little more time is naturally required, but not much, for having completed the shooting at one range, no time is lost in passing on to the next, and so on as above.

It is true that in some cases one range at a time is finished by all the competitors (if the number is not very large) before another is commenced, but under these conditions each man is apt to stroll off with his own particular cory, well knowing that he will not be wanted again for perhaps an hour or two. But in the olden time when the muzzle-loading Enfield was the weapon of the force, things were far different. When an old hand was competing for any substantial prize, the accurate getting off of each individual shot was such a matter of deliberation that if a competitor, or pair of competitors, had been allowed to fire all their shots consecutively, matches would have lasted for days. Now, the breech loading cartridge is inserted in a second or two, and has to be used just as issued. Then, the twisted end of the paper containing the powder had to be bitten or pulled off, in doing which there was a danger of spilling a few grains of the charge. Even in those early days the disastrous consequences which might ensue from this, were fully understood, as several little instruments under the name of cartridge-testers soon found their way into the market. Generally speaking, they were brass tubes into which the powder was poured before putting it into the barrel. If the charge did not come up to a certain mark, it was filled up from a "waster" cartridge, one of which always formed part of the kit of a shooting man. The question of the powder having been seen to, the proper regulation of the bullet next required consideration, the rough and ready method laid down by musketry instructors of simply putting it base downwards into the muzzle of the rifle, and wrenching off the tube which had held the powder, being considered to give unsatisfactory results, as the tube did not always break off where it was intended to, but brought off a strip or two of the lubricating paper surrounding the bullet, thus exposing it unequally to the bore of the rifle. The necessary division then was made with a sharp penknife, and the ball placed "square" in the muzzle and then carefully rammed home, the operation being most deliberately performed. After loading, there came the settling down into the required position, an operation which, together with the necessary calculations as to wind and light, took some little time, thus accounting for the men not being allowed to shoot all their shots consecutively. When, therefore, only two or three targets were available, squads of from fifteen to twenty or even more men were formed, who fired single rounds according to their order. It will, therefore, be understood that a match of any importance took considerable time, and as only an interval of about fifteen or twenty minutes between each shot was allowed to lapse, no one could safely leave the range until the shooting was all over. Thus, the men were much more thrown together.

In those days too, married men of frugal minds took advantage of these protracted contests to combine business with pleasure, as it were,