

Friday, February 10, 1893.

MAJOR-GENERAL LORD METHUEN, C.B., C.M.G., Commanding
Home District, in the Chair.

OUR SWORDSMANSHIP.

By Captain A. HUTTON, late King's Dragoon Guards.

IN the very valuable lecture delivered at Simla, last June, by Colonel King-Harman, on "Officers and their Weapons," with the gist of which, I think, we must all be conversant, he complains of the ignorance of our officers as regards the practical use of the weapons they carry, both their swords and their revolvers. I, for my part, regard the sword as the main weapon, in the wielding of which its bearer should strive to attain as nearly as possible to perfection as his natural capacity will allow; while I think that his revolver should be kept in reserve as an auxiliary arm, only to be resorted to when hard pressed, and in such case he ought to be able to use it with his left hand. I know that some people do not agree with me, but I think you will find that those who hold the contrary opinions hold them because they are utterly ignorant of swordsmanship, and conceive that the easiest way to avoid the discredit is to decry the art of fence as much as possible. Fortunately there are here and there scattered among our regiments a few who study the subject, and have been taught by really good masters, and it is very gratifying to see so many of them here to-day; but, if you were to search the Regiments, Regulars, Militia, and Volunteers right through the Service, I am afraid you would hardly find an average of one such officer per battalion. Colonel King-Harman, with whom I heartily agree, does not blame our young officers so very much, for the reason that, even in the case of those who take a practical interest in the matter, they are obstructed by several serious hindrances.

The want of enthusiasm for swordsmanship is largely due, I think, in the first place, to the apathy of the governing bodies and headmasters of our great schools. Now all, or practically all, of these great schools have now-a-days what are termed Army Classes; which are devoted to preparing boys for the army competitive examinations—to training them, in fact, for a military career. One would be inclined to imagine, if it were not too well known to be otherwise, that these head masters and governing bodies would see the advisability of giving the lads some sort of sound instruction in the use of

the arms they are destined to carry. Some schools, I know, have Volunteer Corps, in which boys are drilled, and taught to use a rifle, the weapon of the private soldier, but the sword, their own future arm *par excellence*, is left out in the cold altogether; in certain cases, it is true, some fencing master of repute is allowed to teach, but attendance at his classes is entirely voluntary, and, as a rule, he only comes down to the school once or twice a week for an hour or two at a time. Now, at most of these schools the boys are compelled to take part in certain games whether they like them or not, usually cricket and football. To cricket and football I am not heretic enough to take exception—they are good, healthy, open-air games, and for schoolboys generally very desirable; but I really think that in the case of the army classes, out of six days of compulsory football some three hours might be devoted to teaching the, to them, much more necessary art of fencing; in fact, every boy in the army class ought to be compelled to learn this just as much as he is compelled to take part in the other games, and the instruction ought to be given by a master of the highest proficiency obtainable, whether at home or from abroad. The *foil* should be the weapon selected for the commencement, for when foil practice and sabre play are properly taught, the former leads naturally into the latter. As compulsory work, three good hours a week should be sufficient, but the boys should be encouraged to attend voluntarily as much as possible, and the more intelligent of them should be inducted into the art of teaching also. Some schoolmasters, I know, will hold up their hands in horror at the bare idea of such an innovation as this; but I must remind those gentlemen that army classes themselves are an innovation, and that the ultimate needs of their members ought to be attended to. From my own experience I know that, provided the instruction be sound and the teacher intelligent, a boy of fifteen will learn to fence in about one-third of the time that is required to teach a grown-up man, although the man may be only in his twenties; and if the boys in these classes were but so taught, they would join their regiments not only expert swordsmen, but with such a passionate fondness for the art that they would bid fair to inoculate their less enthusiastic brother officers with the same virtue.

Let us now, for the sake of argument, suppose that the schoolmasters are willing to recognise fencing as necessary for their pupils; they will naturally ask, where are we to obtain satisfactory teachers? My answer to the great rich schools is, if you want, as you ought to want, a really proficient resident master, you will have, until the country possesses a national school of arms at which such men may be trained, to import him from France, the headquarters of the art. You will not, of course, get one of the highest rank to leave his country, any more than the French racing men can get the leading English jockeys to settle permanently over there, but you will easily get very excellent teachers of at least the second rank, provided their salaries are forthcoming; while in large provincial towns, such, for instance, as Eastbourne, in which place, as a resident friend of mine told me not long ago, "keeping school is the leading industry," there ought

to be occupation for more masters than one, and yet, owing to the attitude maintained towards swordsmanship at present by the school-masters, if a really proficient man were to take up his abode there, I do not believe he would be able to earn his living. Here in London there are a few fencing rooms, some of them kept by Englishmen; but it is a fact, that if we want fresh men who can teach the art as it ought to be taught, we have to go to France to look for them. At the London Fencing Club, French professors are always employed; this should not be the case, for, as the "Saturday Review" pointed out more than a year ago, there ought to be about the country enough sound teachers not only to supply our provincial towns, but our villages also, if necessary.

The only establishment in the country which professes to train fencing instructors is the military one at Aldershot, and it appears to me that both its traditions and its methods have never been such as to command success. It was inaugurated some thirty years ago, and, being then an absolutely new creation, how very easy it would have been to have founded a school which would have rivalled the famous French military school at Joinville le Pont; and there ought to be no reason whatever why we should not possess instructors equal to M. Sauze and his comrades, who were brought over to the Royal Military Tournament in 1891, not to enter the lists against our military masters, but merely to perform before the public.

At the time I have alluded to, early in the sixties, it is not easy to conceive why our authorities abstained from calling in the assistance of one or other of the great London masters, for there were then among us several men of very high professional repute, any one of whom might have been employed to train a nucleus of instructors; there was Henry Angelo, the last of his house, with his chief assistant and afterward successor, the famous McTurk, the greatest swordsman and most accomplished master of fence that our nation has ever produced; there was Captain Chiosso, a teacher equal, if not superior, to Mr. Angelo, and there was Mr. Shury; while among resident foreigners there were MM. Gillemand, Pons, and Prevost, all of the first rank. Professors such as these as head-masters, under the supervision of officers possessing sufficient skill in the art to be able to see whether or no the master and his assistants were doing their work thoroughly, would have created for us a training school of the highest order. But none of these eminent men were selected; on the contrary, the authorities confided their work to a Mr. Archibald McLaren, who then kept a gymnasium at Oxford. This gentleman was undoubtedly an adept at teaching elementary gymnastics, but unfortunately for us he was not a swordsman, although he believed himself to be not only that, but a master also; to his establishment then an officer, not, I think, selected on account of his prowess as a fencer, and a party of non-commissioned officers were sent for instruction, and there they remained for a matter of six months, a period pretended to be sufficient not only to make them fencing masters, but gymnasts as well; and it is this wretched six months that has done so much harm ever since. All swordsmen, who fence with their

brains as well as with their bodies, know well that it will take a year of good solid work, taking a lesson three times a week, to make a man a passable amateur, and that with the foil only; while I am told that in France it takes two years, working every day, and all day, to train a mere *prevôt*, the lowest rank of instructor, who is not allowed to teach except under the supervision of the master himself; and in Italy, as Signor Parise informed me last year, it takes three years to form a master; and yet at our military training school the man receives his certificate after six months' tuition, during which time he has to undergo a gymnastic course, and possibly one of boxing also, which naturally reduces his fencing to something like three months; and it must be remembered that he has not the advantage of studying either under a Sauze or a Parise. A six months' course is utterly inadequate, even were the system of instruction one of the highest order, which it is not; and when we compare this official system, which our army instructors are compelled to use, with the time-honoured method of the French masters, the faults of the former become so glaring that it is a matter of astonishment that such a book should have been forced upon us for more than a quarter of a century.

With the first part of this work, which deals with the elementary positions, there is but little fault to find; this, however, is not due to its author, but to the strenuous opposition to his teaching of the late Mr. George Chapman, one of the finest and most learned amateur swordsmen that ever existed; but, unfortunately for us, Mr. Chapman directed his attention to the first part only, and it is the rest of this book which, so far as time permits, I must compare with the true French school.

McLaren gives us, much as other writers do, the four lines of attack as seen when the foil is held in the central or medium guard; and he also explains the engagements of *quarte* and *tierce*, in which, of course, one out of the four lines is covered, but he makes the mistake of basing all his subsequent lessons on this central guard, in which every one of the four lines is left open.

We now come to what are termed "direct attacks," which are attacks made upon any opening shown by the opponent, without having recourse to a feint or other movement for the purpose of creating one; they comprise the "*straight thrust*," the "*disengagement*," a thrust delivered on the line immediately opposite to that on which the engagement is formed, the "*dérobement*" made on the uncovered line, high or low, on the side of the engagement, and the "*coupé*," or *cut over the point* which can only be employed on the upper lines. With these the official book confuses series after series of attacks in two and three movements, which cannot be "direct," as they have in their composition one or more feints or deceptions of the blade. Common sense would suggest making the pupil acquainted with these, the simplest forms of attack, before showing him the way of defending himself from them. McLaren thought otherwise, and he put the cart before the horse by teaching the parries before making it clear to the beginner exactly what they are meant to counteract.

Now for the parries. There are two ways of effecting a parry: first, the incomplete form of the "*parade d'opposition*," in which the foil is merely passed into the required position in such a manner as to cause the advancing point to glide off it, a more or less sluggish movement, and, second, the complete one of the "*parade du tac*," which finishes with a bright, crisp, little rap on the adverse blade, the springiness of which helps greatly towards the prompt delivery of the *riposte*; the latter (*parade du tac*) is the parry used by the French masters, while the former, the incomplete one, is enjoined by our official book.

I now come to a very important matter in connection with the parries: the two positions of the hand, *supination*, when it is held with the palm more or less upwards, and *pronation*, when the palm is more or less turned down. We can easily perceive which of these is preferable by taking a foil in our hand, and holding it in the position of *sixte*, which is the extreme point of supination; we now place a couple of fingers of our left hand on the lower part of the biceps muscle, and we find that muscle doing its office in supporting the forearm and sword in their proper position. We now turn our hand gradually round to *seconde*, the extreme point of pronation, and we find that the biceps, practically speaking, goes off duty, the result being that the hand, when in pronation, is very liable to be drawn downwards by a low feint, and, being so drawn down, it misses the power necessary to pull it up again.

The French recognise eight simple parries, four of them in supination and four in pronation; in supination we have *quarte*, with the palm of the hand half turned up, for the inner high line, and *septime* formed from it by simply dropping the point for the inner low line, *sixte* with the hand in full supination for the high outside, while from *sixte* is formed the *octave* for the low outside by again merely dropping the point; these are the parries usually taught by the best French masters. Certain Englishmen have, I know, objected to *sixte* and *octave* because they allege them to be weak positions; if, however, they are correctly formed they are strong enough, and that which is stronger than strong enough very soon degenerates into the coarse and clumsy.

The four parries in pronation are *prime* for the high inside, *quinte*, formed something like *quarte*, only with the palm turned half down, for the low inside, *tierce* for the high outside, and *seconde*, a very heavy parry, for the low outside. These movements are sometimes given to advanced pupils, but only as surprise parries, and not as a means of training the hand. The official book dismisses the supinations somewhat airily as belonging to "the early stages of the art;" a complete mistake, for, as history shows us, the rapier, the demi-rapier, and the early small sword were used chiefly in pronation, and in some cases the swords were actually biased to that effect. It gives us, first, what it erroneously calls *quarte*, with "the back of the hand turned slightly upwards," which is not a *quarte* at all, but a *quinte*, the most faulty parry of the whole eight, as it forces the point off the line, thereby interfering with the *riposte*. It gives us *tierce*

formed in the usual way, and also the *seconde*; this latter is properly formed from *tierce*, as is *octave* from *sixte*, by simply dropping the point; but the Regulation book goes out of its way to make the movement an awkward one, forming it by a "semi-circular sweep downwards and outwards over the inner line," which is not menaced at all, before arriving at the line which has to be defended, while it totally ignores the *septime*, which is, perhaps, the most brilliant and the most baffling of all the parries, and without which many very important combinations of defence are impossible, but puts in its place a monstrosity called "semi-circle," which the author facetiously describes as "the most artistically formed" of the series; this calls for especial notice.

Observe that the point to be defended is the low inner line, to do which, from the *quarte* engagement, we have only to drop our point; but the Regulations ordain it to be otherwise, namely, by "a free sweep of the blade over the outer line traversing the under division of both lines," which brings us, after having traversed three-quarters of a circle, into that very position of *septime* which we had reached by much simpler means. Well; awkward as their movement is, one would suppose that, having at last arrived at the line threatened, they would be satisfied; but no! they go still further, "ascending on the upper portion of the inner line until the point rests at the elevation of the shoulder, and a few inches above the hand, slanting obliquely to the left front"—that is to say, with the point designedly off the line—not a good position to *riposte* from. Compare the text with the illustration and you will see that if we carry out the order faithfully we finish by guiding the enemy's point straight into our own face. This is bad enough, but the counter of this parry, termed "counter-circle," is even worse. I think, however, it is scarcely worth while to spend time in discussing it in detail, and I have, moreover, decided to point out only the primary blunders of this system; to deal with it completely would take too long a time.

There is another thing much to be deplored in our military teaching, and that is the "class lessons." The French military school is most positive in enjoining that the instruction shall be *always individual*; ten minutes of personal teaching is worth more than an hour's work in squad or class, in which it is impossible, especially in the case of lessons in two ranks, to train the pupils, rough beginners as they are, to execute the movements with that closeness and delicacy which is the life and soul of point fencing; and, moreover, it is practically impossible for the instructor to notice and check all of even the most palpable mistakes. As a case in point, not so very long ago I was looking at a performance of this sort, when a thing struck me—which had evidently not struck the teacher—and it was that half the men in the squad were holding their foils upside down; and I wish you could have seen that sergeant's face when I pointed it out to him. These class lessons with the foil are more to be condemned even than those which the officers have to perform in the infantry sword exercise, about which Colonel King-Harman spoke so emphati-

cally; their only possible object can be to save trouble to a lazy instructor at the expense of the efficiency of his pupils.

With such a system as this, and with instructors so inadequately trained, can we be surprised that our young officers take scant interest in the subject? Besides, in the infantry they have but slight opportunity for learning the little they might learn; for, although cavalry regiments are allowed a fencing room of some sort in their own barracks, this luxury is still, I believe, withheld from the infantry, although from the nature of their work they have much more time to spend in it.

Before leaving the foil, I should like to draw attention to something very important to the student; it is the need of cultivating two great faculties: one being "*doigté*," or the art of guiding the foil with the fingers rather than with the wrist; while the second is "*sentiment du fer*," which governs and decides the movements of the weapon, especially in defence, by the sense of touch. Nearly all the great masters of this century tell us in their works something about the advantage of possessing these faculties, but they one and all omit one thing, and that is to tell us how to acquire them; in fact, the masters undoubtedly regard them as trade secrets, and, therefore, by no means to be imparted to their amateur pupils; they are scarcely to be regarded as natural gifts, but they can easily be acquired. I will explain the "*doigté*" first.

A few months ago I happened to be laid up from an accident, and, being unable to fence, I took to thinking instead. It seemed to me that there must be some way of training the fingers to control the foil; so I got hold of a light little George III small sword and began manipulating it in this way: I placed it correctly in my hand, and then lifted up the thumb from off the grip, and commenced guiding the movements of the point with absolutely nothing more than the forefinger, and this, although I was lying on the sofa, I found to answer my expectations so well that I got up on to my crutches in order to complete the study. I made, or imagined, a little spot about the size of a shilling on the wall, about as high as my shoulder; I extended my arm and sword completely towards it, and then executed, using the spot as a mark, such simple movements as disengage, one, two, double, &c., and I found that by guiding with the forefinger only the movements became extraordinarily close and accurate, and I experimented similarly with the simple and counter parries, and with combinations of them, finishing each movement with a *riposte*. Now these are exercises which we can perform by ourselves without the assistance of a master, but it must be distinctly understood that they are nothing more than gymnastic practices for the finger; I feel sure, however, that, if they are used with regularity, the finger will become so habituated to doing the work that it will continue to do it when the foil is held in the usual manner in a lesson or an assault. I will not trouble you here with all the detail of these studies, because I have already made them public in the United Service Magazine of this month.

The second of these faculties is the "*sentiment du fer*," and it also

is to be gained by study; but here the assistance of another person is required, although a professional master is not absolutely necessary, seeing that two amateurs who understand the movements can practise them together, and so very materially improve each other's play. The exercises are performed at half distance, and the attacks are delivered with the simple extension of the arm, and without the lunge, as the object in view is the training of the hand only. They are, moreover, as beneficial to the one who acts the part of master as to the pupil, for, in order to give the lesson properly, the movements of his foil have to be studiously close and accurate; and here he will find the benefit of having previously mastered the "*doigté*" studies. These lessons are no invention of my own, but were given to me many years ago, for a special purpose, by that famous master the late Mr. McTurk. They are well known to many foreign fencing masters, but, beyond myself, I do not know more than two or three living amateurs to whom they have been imparted; the masters hold them back from the mass of their pupils just as they hold back the "*doigté*." I have arranged them in "*The Swordsman*" in five parts, under the name of "*Blindfold Lessons*." Their essence is that the pupil learns in executing his parries and *ripostes* to be guided by the sense of touch alone, for during the whole of them he has his eyes shut; the result is that the entire power of sensibility centres itself in the arm and hand to such an extent that the nerves seem almost as if they were continued into the blade itself, and this sensation is emphasized by the master feeling the pupil's blade, not by pressure, but by moving his own foil up and down the centre of it, making the steel bite, so that when this feeling ceases he knows that the master is disengaging, and that it is time to execute whatever parry has been previously ordered.

I must now revert again to the text on which I am preaching—Colonel King-Harman's lecture. He is very severe upon the "mild course of singlestick play" which the officer goes through when he is young, and the "curious course of instruction in what is known as the infantry sword exercise," and it is of this latter especially that I must now speak. First, with regard to the manner in which it makes us hold the sword, with the thumb and fingers clasped round the handle; this was objected to in quite early times by a famous old swordsman, Captain John Godfrey, who lived in the days of the eighteenth century gladiators, was a pupil of the celebrated Fig, and brought out in 1747 a very interesting and instructive work on the small and back sword, and this is what he says: "The common way of holding the sword is with a kind of globular hand, that is, with all the fingers and the thumb making a circle round the sword. The consequence is that, when you come to make your cut, your gripe moves and slips round your palm, and you lose your directing edge. But let the sword be held with your thumb raised upon the surface, and extended in a straight line, you will never fail to carry an edge." This is the way in which both the Italian and the French masters hold their sabres, but the faulty hilt and absurdly short grip which we are compelled to use make it, for us, somewhat difficult. This

regulation way of holding the weapon is conducive only to coarse and heavy play, which is furthered by the performance of what is termed the "assault," in which the cuts are made from the shoulder and elbow, a bad preparation for an exercise which has to be defensive as well as offensive. The great Italian masters, Parise and Cesarano, as well as the French, instead of using a cumbrous "assault" of this kind, train the hands of the beginners with a series of exercises called "*molinelli*" or "*moulinets*," in which the arm is held quite straight, and the revolutions of the sword are made only with the wrist and fingers.

I take great exception also to the "engaging guard;" this is a rather low hanging guard, and about the most awkward position conceivable for the arm to be placed in, owing to what Godfrey describes as "the twisting and straining of the muscles," especially those of the shoulder, whose work it is to hold up the arm. The prize-fighting "gladiators" of that time—for the early prize fights were with sharp swords and not with fists—certainly recognised a guard of this nature, and called it by a rather disagreeable name, "the coward's guard," to wit, a sort of guard for a timid swordsman to crouch under, but a very bad one for a bold man to attack from. I allow that for the defence of the inside it is fairly useful, but experience tells me that it leaves the outside dangerously open both to direct and indirect attacks, especially when the opponent stands on the medium. This latter was recognised by Godfrey, Lonergan, Miller, and, in fact, all the leading writers of those very practical times. It is a middle position between *quarte* and *tierce*, and the thumb, as Godfrey recommends, is extended along the back of the grip. Now it is only by the action of the thumb and fingers in this position that the feints can be made with the necessary crispness; and, further, it is by a sudden and quick pressure of the thumb on the back of the grip that an initial velocity is imparted to the cut sufficient to render unnecessary those heavy slogging movements which I have already condemned.

The greatest fault of all in the infantry sword exercise is that it inculcates the teaching of swordsmanship *only* in squads of single or double rank, and ignores individual instruction altogether, the result being that it degenerates into a mere barrack-yard drill, robbed entirely of the interest which attaches to an intelligent personal lesson. The utter feebleness of a performance of this kind is only too palpable, and it tends to create indifference a great deal more than enthusiasm.

What is really needed as a text-book is a judicious blend of the time-honoured English broadsword play with certain details, and not so very many of them, derived from the modern Italians (and this I claim to have already provided in "Cold Steel" and "The Swordsman"): first the "*moulinets*," and, second, the high *quarte* and high *tierce* as head parries (though these are really old English, and are recommended by Godfrey), together with a very important auxiliary parry which I have introduced under the name of "high octave." The people who are charged with the training of our military fencing masters appear to be either unwilling or unable to under-

stand this, so I had better point out its uses, which are: first, to stop a *riposte* delivered over the blade after a *quarte* parry, and, second, to parry a cut at the right cheek delivered after giving a beat with the back of the sword on the inside of the opponent's blade. All this was brought to our notice last year at the Royal Military Tournament by Signor Parise himself, who, of course, called the high octave by its Italian name of "*ceduta di sesta*," but those who cannot or will not see what is put to them in plain English are not likely to understand it much better when explained in a foreign tongue.

In conclusion, I must repeat that we have no right to be surprised at any apathy on the part of our young officers, seeing the disadvantages under which they labour. In most cases they have not so much as a room in which to practise fencing if they are so minded; while, where there is a garrison gymnasium within reach, the only instruction they can get is of so poor a quality that it is almost worse than useless. For this I do not blame the sergeant instructors, because it is not their fault; most of those whom I have met with have been good hard working men, extremely keen and anxious to acquire any information that a well-skilled person may be good-natured enough to give them; but they are compelled by order to teach a system they know to be wrong, and which is no better than a sorry burlesque on fencing as it is taught at its headquarters in France. That interest in the subject should be so slight is not their fault, nor is it the fault of the young officer; the fault must be looked for elsewhere.

The CHAIRMAN: We are very grateful to Captain Hutton for the interesting and emphatic lecture he has delivered to us, and not only for the large attendance that there is, but also for the number of names that I have already had submitted to me for the discussion. Before I make any remarks of my own, I will say it is a subject of very deep interest, I might say of vital importance, to the army, and I hope you will speak out openly and frankly what you think.

Major-General F. HAMMERSLEY: Lord Methuen, ladies, and gentlemen, the lecturer has ventured to speak disparagingly of a dear old friend of mine, the late Mr. Archibald McLaren, to whom not only the army, but the country at large, is more indebted than is generally known for the great progress that has been made in physical education during the last twenty-five or thirty years. I will not comment upon the taste he displays in thus decrying a dead man.

Captain HUTTON: That is rather strong.

Major-General HAMMERSLEY: It is strong, for I feel strongly; but I will not allow his memory to be assailed, and as far as my poor powers go I will endeavour to do justice to it. In 1858 or 1859 it was brought to the notice of the military authorities that a system of gymnastic instruction had been found very beneficial in the Prussian and French armies, and a Committee was appointed, consisting of Sir Frederick, then Colonel, Hamilton, of the Grenadier Guards, Dr. Parkes, Professor of Hygiene at Netley, and Mr. Archibald McLaren, all, alas, now with the majority. They were instructed to visit the different schools in Germany and France, and report. Their report was approved, and it was decided to establish a somewhat similar system in our own army. The question then was where the instructors should be trained, and it was decided that a class of non-commissioned officers should be selected, and sent to be trained by Mr. McLaren at his gymnasium in Oxford. I must remind you that at this time there were scarcely any gymnasia in the country; there were none in any of the public schools. There were scarcely any in any provincial towns, and even in London there were only a

few fencing schools, such as Angelo's, Chiosso's, the London Fencing Club, and some others, where fencing was principally taught, and also a certain amount of gymnastics, but on no regular system, and nothing that could be dignified by the term physical education, as Mr. McLaren called it. This class of non-commissioned officers, not too carefully selected, because Commanding Officers were loath to spare good men for what they did not see was likely to be of much benefit, was sent to Oxford under an officer who the lecturer says in his paper was not selected for any prowess in fencing, but he spared my blushes in reading it by leaving that out. It is quite true that this officer was not a fencer, but at the same time he gave sufficient satisfaction to the military authorities to be entrusted with the direction of the gymnastic instruction of the army for upwards of fifteen years. These instructors were trained by Mr. McLaren, and at the same time he busied himself by compiling a book of instructions in all the different exercises suitable for the army. It is very probable that with the progress that has been made in physical education during the last twenty years some faults might be found with this book, but at the time it was compiled it was certainly very far in advance of anything that had been hitherto published. We are also very much indebted to Mr. McLaren and this first class of non-commissioned officers for this great progress in gymnastics; for from the start thus made instructors have been sent out, not only to the army, but to gymnasia all over the country, literally in hundreds; for now I may also tell you that almost every public school is provided with a good gymnasium under capable instructors, notwithstanding the sneers of the lecturer, and there are hundreds in the different provincial towns.

The CHAIRMAN: Instructors in gymnastics or fencing?

Major-General HAMMERSLEY: Gymnastics. I have now done with gymnastics, and will turn to the immediate subject of the lecture. It is very true that this class of non-commissioned officers who were sent to Oxford did not leave that place with very much knowledge of the art, and they could scarcely be expected to learn fencing and gymnastics in the short space of six months; but Mr. McLaren very wisely thought that it would be well to teach them at all events the rudiments of the art, trusting to further practice and instruction, possibly under English or foreign professors, to improve themselves. That object was kept in view; but the jealousy of the London Fencing Club was such that, though with great difficulty and with the assistance of an influential member of the Club I obtained permission for the principal fencing instructor at the Aldershot Gymnasium to visit the room while fencing was going on, the fencing instructors there, MM. Gillemand and Prevost, were not permitted to give him a lesson or even cross foils with him. We were, therefore, thrown upon our own resources, and left to do the best we could for ourselves, and I am free to confess that bad was the best. But the lecturer is bold enough to say of Mr. McLaren that he was not a swordsman, though he believed himself to be not only that, but a master also. Captain Hutton is strangely in error. Mr. McLaren during his youth spent many years in Paris, where he practised at all the principal *salles d'armes*, and he was not afraid to meet any one, professional or amateur. He told me himself—and I had no right to doubt his word—that he had gained his diploma, as they called it, of *maitre d'armes*, which the lecturer well knows is jealously guarded, and is never given to any candidate, except after a very searching test by a committee of experts, and showing that he is thoroughly capable of instructing. I have now said my say in defence of my old friend, and I hope that before we leave this room Captain Hutton will have the grace to say that he spoke without sufficient knowledge of him. I will now turn to the book. It is true it is a faulty book, and I do not doubt at all that Mr. McLaren would have written a very different sort of book for a different class of learners, but it was intended simply as a handbook to commence instruction in fencing, and it must be remembered the class of men it was intended for and the time at which it was written. I was not a fencer when I went to Oxford, as Captain Hutton justly observes, and I have not practised much since, my taste not lying that way, so I do not feel competent to answer his objections to the faults, as he calls them, and no doubt there are a great many faults, in the book; but, with your permission, in the absence of Colonel Fox, who has been obliged to go abroad I should like to read a paper which he has left, and asked me to read against th

views of the lecturer, and in some sort explaining the book. He says: "Lord Methuen and gentlemen, I agree with Captain Hutton's remarks that the practice of arms should be more generally studied among the officers of our army, both in the cavalry and in the infantry, than it is. Unfortunately only a very small minority of them take any interest in the matter. As to our public schools, I much doubt if their head masters will, as a body, accept Captain Hutton's opinion on this subject. At present the physical training of candidates for the army is sadly neglected, the excuse given being invariably that all their energy is required for the mental strain necessary to prepare them for the examination. Any physiologist can tell us how absurd such an excuse is, the *mens sana* not being capable, if the individual is to be adapted to lasting purposes, of a separation from the *corpus sanum*. But this is somewhat beside the present question. But would it be wise to ask these young men, whose brains are already overworked in the majority of cases, to attempt to learn the art of fencing, an art that is universally acknowledged by leading physiologists to be a severer tax upon the brain than any other form of exercise, and one that, even to an artist like M. Mérignac, of Paris, is at times an almost unbearable mental and nervous strain? Besides which, fencing, if indulged in to any extent by unformed and growing youths, frequently produces lateral curvature of the spine and other deformities. If necessary, I can produce chapter and verse for this statement." Some gentlemen laugh at that statement, but I should like to read a doctor's opinion upon that point, a doctor who has given up a great deal of his time to gymnasia and studied physical education very closely. The doctor says, "The physique of the majority of army candidates is lamentable, and the more so because it is easily preventable. The physical education in our public schools is practically *nil*, the national games being in no way educational, but only recreative, exercises and games of skill, all of which games are necessarily attended by predominant use of only certain parts of the body and sets of muscles. All such games of skill, if practised assiduously (as they are by those who show a natural aptitude for them), involve partial development of the body, with the necessary corollary, asymmetry of the body, which means more or less actual deformity. Fencing is essentially an exercise of skill, as much, too, an exercise of the brain as of the limbs, and the fatigue attendant on fencing is less a muscular fatigue than a nervous one. All games of skill indulged in during the developmental period of the skeleton (which is most active from 16 or 17 to 25 years of age) should go hand in hand with regular, systematized exercises, which only can produce a symmetrical development of the body. And the inexcusable (except through ignorance) neglect of this sends the sorry apologies of manhood into the world that we so often see. Fencing, owing to its peculiar tendency to produce curvature of the spine, lowering of the shoulder, and concomitant flattening of the chest, should on no account be allowed during the malleable and yielding, and still growing, period of the skeleton. For army candidates fencing, as an art, should certainly not be taught until their entrance into Sandhurst, and then only when accompanied by systematic exercises applied to the whole body." Colonel Fox continues, "I am not concerned with the past history of the Aldershot gymnasium, or its original formation. But it seems to me that it would have been almost impossible to have started it on the same lines as that at Joinville, where the non-commissioned officers under training devote three years (of seven hours' work a day) to the study of the art of fencing alone. The number entering every year is one hundred (all having previously had, at least, one year's training under their regimental *maitre d'armes*, and being selected for Joinville, because they have shown exceptional promise). Only sixteen of every hundred ever qualify as *maitre d'armes*, the remainder being sent away as unworthy of further instruction. Whatever faults the lecturer may have found with the old system of teaching at Aldershot, I do not think he should condemn the present until he has honoured us with a visit, and seen the work that is being done, and the system of instruction that is now carried out there. As regards the 'six months' fencing and gymnastic course, and the amount of work that has to be crowded into it, I must draw attention to the fact that there are many other matters to be considered besides the desirability of teaching men to fence. What we want to

produce in this country for our army instructors is a really good 'all-round' man, and not a brilliant fencer only. If Captain Hutton chooses, he can see at Aldershot sixty-five non-commissioned officers who have had thirty days' instruction in fencing (of forty minutes per day), with whose progress he will be able to find but little, if any, fault. I believe that the last reprint of the book which is alluded to was issued in 1896. It has been out of print, and disused, for at least five years. The art of fencing cannot be learnt from a book. Therefore it appears to me hardly practical, or desirable, to issue one, unless the authorities order me to do so. The present system of foil-fencing at Aldershot more closely resembles that carried out at Joinville-le-pont than any other. This being the case, I consider that I may safely ignore Captain Hutton's criticisms on the attacks and parries that he supposes we teach. Our system of sabre-play follows closely the lines of that elaborated by the Cavaliere Massiello of Florence, which I consider more practical than any other, and also much more suited to the needs of our army. I altogether decline to have the system of fencing at Aldershot judged by the standard of an official work which is out of print, that I had no hand in compiling, and whose *dicta* are absolutely unacted upon in the headquarter gymnasium. Class teaching of fencing has been abolished at Aldershot for some time. As a general rule one instructor has charge of every three or four men. In sabre-play an 'upright' engaging guard has been in use for a very long time, instead of the 'hanging-guard' that Captain Hutton now very rightly condemns, although in one of his earlier works (that is now in my possession) he recommends its adoption. I consider that the 'moulinets' he recommends are utterly useless for a sword suitable to our army, since they are done with the wrist only. To be of any practical value (i.e., to teach a swordsman to deliver a disabling cut), they must be done with the hand, wrist, forearm, and elbow, combined in co-ordinate action (the muscles of the shoulder being used as little as possible), as recommended by the Cavaliere Massiello. The grasp of the sword, that we have taught for some years, is that with the thumb extending along the hilt. To conclude, I cannot but think it is a pity that Captain Hutton has not taken the trouble to find out for himself, or to come and see what is actually going on in the headquarter fencing establishment at Aldershot, before condemning it, as he is evidently in entire ignorance of the system that is carried out there."

Colonel Gordon M. Ives: As one of the unfortunate "cripples" condemned by that doctor, I present myself before you after forty years' experience of fencing, for I began fencing at fifteen, and am now fifty-five, and still believe I am not a cripple. I still fence when I can, almost every day of my life. I really think we have gone a little bit astray in the last five or six minutes. Captain Hutton, I am perfectly certain, did not give this lecture with a view of attacking anybody. It is for the future and not for the past, and I would beg of us all to "Let the dead past bury its dead." We are not met here to abuse anybody who has done work, and I am quite certain that that gentleman whom I never heard of before, but who is so ably defended by General Hammersley, did the work to the very best of his ability, and probably very good work up to the date at which he finished. But we all know very well, because there is no human being can deny it, that in the whole English army, out of many thousands of officers who carry swords, there are comparatively very few who have the smallest notion of using the weapon they carry with that absolute confidence that habit alone gives, because there have been no teachers and they have never been taught. That, gentlemen, is what we have met here to try and bring before the public. It is not for us in this room to say exactly how it is best to be remedied. Our chairman, who is one of the finest fencers in the world, has already expressed his concurrence in some of the views that are likely to find favour here by being present to-day. What I think Captain Hutton wishes to point out is that the officers of our army in all its branches are absolutely ignorant of almost all kinds of sword fighting. I happened to be going down to hunt near my home in Hampshire one day, knowing nothing of the school at Aldershot, and meeting two officers in the train also going to the same meet of the hounds, I said, "If Sir Evelyn Wood will allow me to come and practise in the summer time, when I am at home, at the Fencing School, at Aldershot, I shall be very glad." They said no doubt he would. I said, "Do many officers go

there?" The reply was "No, hardly one." They said, "You will find some instructors there, and you will find some very fairly trained men, but you will not find any officers there." That may or may not be correct as I understood it; but I believe it was, and I have no reason to doubt it. The fencing school is known all over the world as being the finest school that exists for training the nerves of men. There is probably nothing that makes a man's nerves so good and sound as perpetually standing opposite to his fellow man and fighting him. I will go so far as to say that if you take the greatest muff that ever lived with the sword, if that muff has been accustomed to stand opposite another man and peg into him for years and years, or even for one year, that muff that was, will be a better man if he stands up to fight a fellow-man who is perhaps naturally more skilful, but who has never had a sword in his hand. The habit of fighting is of enormous value. Formerly our boys learnt it a little by fighting very largely at every school, and, although that is a comparatively small way of fighting, yet still it did an infinity of good. That fighting does not, I am told, any longer exist to the same extent, and fencing is really the school-room of fighting, it is the very beginning of fighting, and must be practised by every man who wants to fight well with any kind of sword. But at the same time that is only to a certain extent. It is the teaching element of the sword only, for if you have to fight a man you must recollect that you have not, when fighting, got a mask on. The mask in fencing makes just the difference—in fencing you do not hit the head: in fighting you hit the head. I came here to-day hoping that this might be the introduction to forming a sort of lead to public opinion, to point out that there are absolutely hardly any officers of the English army who can fight with the sword at all, with skill, and knowing that there are thousands of those officers, of all the Services, now waiting and wishing to be taught, I hope that by coming here to-day and listening to the very able lecture, supported as we are in this room, we may draw public attention to this matter. If we can lead the authorities to lend a not unwilling ear to our feeble cry, we shall, I am sure, have achieved the object of this meeting.

Captain H. H. WIGRAM, Scots Gds.: Captain Hutton has gone over the ground, I think, so thoroughly that he has left very little to be added beyond confirming his remarks. But there are two or three things which might be said to belong to the subject and which I think ought to be pointed out. One is that this apathy, as I am afraid we must call it, on the part of regimental officers, with regard to fencing and swordsmanship, is a great deal of it, due to what Captain Hutton has pointed out, viz., the difficulty of obtaining instruction. I can only say that I, myself, who have been practising swordsmanship in one form or another for some fifteen years, have found it almost impossible to obtain anything like good instruction from anybody excepting a foreign professor. That practically means that you must live more or less in a large town. If you live in London you can get good teaching; I believe you can in some provincial towns. I can only say my recent experience on that subject is that when three or four of us who are rather keen about swordsmanship tried to get hold of a fencing master in Dublin, which I think we may describe as a fairly large town, we were absolutely unable to find one. Unfortunately the man who ought to be able to help us, the regimental instructor—it is no fault of his, and regimental instructors are always the first to acknowledge it—is not a man who helps at all. He is only too willing to learn and to help one as far as he can in every possible way, but he is no use as a swordsman. There is another thing which I think rather goes against officers taking up swordsmanship in the way that many of us think they ought to do, and that is that there is an impression existing that close quarter fighting is a thing of the past. I think that is due to a very great extent to the fact that there are certain, perhaps rather too broad, views which have been taken with regard to the last great war of 1870-71. I think we shall probably find in the next war, unless it happens over the same ground, that there will be a great deal of close quarter fighting. Battles will not always be fought over perfectly open ground, such as you see at Vionville. Gravelotte, in the greater part of Würth and at Weissenburg, and if there is any fighting in a close country, above all, if there is, as we hear there is likely to be, great use of night attacks, I must say I do not see how close quarter fighting is going to be avoided. I speak with all due respect to better judges, but I think it will be found

that in a *mêlée* of any kind, whether by day or night, a sword is a much handier thing to use than a revolver. I do not think the statistics we get with regard to the 1870 war give one any reliable result with regard to the amount of casualties that occurred in the various engagements where either the sword or the bayonet was much used. The day before yesterday, after considerable trouble, I succeeded in finding out that the last published book on tactics, Baker's "Tactics," gives 0·08 per cent. as the amount of wounds by sword or bayonet. But that applies to the whole war, and, I think, if you were to take it as being universally true that the casualties in no engagement exceeded 0·08 of the force engaged, you would get just as wild a result as you would get if you generalized from the results (which I only happened to come across this morning) that in one particular battle, at Chenebier, by one single mitrailleuse discharge, twenty-one men were knocked over, while if you look at the statistics in the same book you will find the total loss by mitrailleuse fire was something like 0·05 per cent. There is one particular application of swordsmanship which I think comes closer to us as Englishmen than to any other nation, that is, swordsmanship in savage warfare. On the 23rd March, 1885, the battalion to which I belonged marched to MacNeill's zaroba. The battle had taken place the day before. I came across a friend in one of the regiments which had most distinguished itself in the fight, and I asked him "how he had got on." "Well," he said, "when the rush came I was knocked over. I got up again and saw a big Arab coming at me. I knew I was no good with a sword, so I took my revolver and fired at his stomach,—and hit him between the eyes." There is another argument against the revolver, and that is that it is absolutely inefficient against a savage, who has got great tenacity of life. Over and over again—I dare say some in this room have seen it—a savage has been seen to charge with blood spurting out in half a dozen places from bullet hits. If he does not happen to be hit in the right place it does not stop him when he is well on the rush. I dare say there are plenty here who can give a like experience. Again, in Afghanistan and Burmah, we constantly hear of hand to hand encounters, generally on a small scale, but still very important to the man; they happen to, and I strongly suspect some advice which was given to some of us in 1885 by one of the Soudan residents will apply in most of these cases. What he said was, "Never you try to get your point in first. You must parry the other fellow's first cut. If you do that you have got him. If you run him through he has got you, because you won't stop him." I am thankful to say I have never myself had occasion to make use of his advice. That is possibly the reason I am here now. There is one point about almost all our infantry swords which I think worth drawing attention to, and that is a want of symmetry in the hilt. It is unequally sided; there is much more weight on one side of the guard than on the other. If you handle one of these swords you will find a tendency, suppose the back of one's hand is up, for the edge to turn down, unless you hold it extremely tight. If you make a cut with it, the moment the edge encounters any resisting substance you will find that tendency becomes still more pronounced. If you take a sword with an equal guard on both sides you will find the tendency does not exist, and the difference it makes against another man, an even guard against an uneven guard, is something astonishing. Therefore, I should like to recommend that, if possible, all swords should be made with a symmetrical guard.

Colonel CLEATHER: I want just to say a word or two about the public schools. I quite agree with Captain Hutton that the army classes in public schools should be taught fencing and sword play. I think I may be allowed to say that the headmaster of the Harrow School is quite willing that this should be done. Although, as he says, he finds it very difficult to fit in this work with other studies, he appreciates the importance of the subject, and, I feel quite certain, some day or other it will be carried out.

Major R. C. B. LAWRENCE, King's Dragoon Guards: Gentlemen, there was one point Captain Hutton mentioned about cricket. I should be very sorry if anything interfered with cricket, "our national game," but I do not think fencing need do so. With regard to what we heard just now about the tactics of the next war, it seems to me that the first thing which will happen will be great engagements of cavalry. If all other things are equal, when the cavalry meet, the result must be a

mêlée, and from that struggle the best swordsmen will most probably emerge victorious. I dare say many of you have read a most charming old book, by the late Captain Nolan, on "Cavalry." In that he speaks of an engagement that occurred, during the time he was in India, between the Nizam's cavalry and the Rohillas, and he mentions that arms and legs, and even heads, were cut off as if by giants. He found that the Nizam's cavalry were armed with old English swords, swords cast by the British cavalry, and mounted by the natives for their own use, but they were kept in wooden scabbards. Captain Nolan inquired how these men were taught to cut. The answer was, they were not taught at all; "a sharp sword will cut in any man's hand." That brings me back to the question of scabbards. The scabbards of European cavalry are of metal, for the sake of durability and appearance; the result is that we cannot hope to keep our swords sharp, and therefore we must trust more to the point. Now, nothing will teach us to use our points so effectively as fencing. Fencing I believe to be the best lesson for this. Human nature's first instinct is to strike, but it is no use striking (i.e., cutting) if you have not got a sharp sword, and we shall not point effectively unless we are taught by a long and hard course to do so almost instinctively. My own personal experience has been this. I have been through a course of fencing two or three times under military instructors, and thought I was getting on pretty well. I came up to town recently and put myself in the hands of a Frenchman. I found that he was like a cat playing with a mouse; he could do anything he liked with me. I felt as if I were a child at the game, and had to begin again at the beginning. With regard to the training of cavalry, I do not think we want gymnastics quite so much as the other arms of the Service, because our men are constantly hard at work physically. Their horses have to be groomed every day, and they have to ride a great deal, which keeps them strong and fit. The fencing would also tend to keep them strong and give them greater confidence in their arms, and the more confident they were in the use of their weapons the more irresistible would they be. With regard to the interest the subaltern officers take in it, in my own regiment, at present, nearly all the subalterns attend fencing every evening from 6 to 7. It does not interfere with duty, hunting, or anything else of importance, and I do not see why this should not be done always, and with the best results. I think the subject is one that has not commanded much interest in the past, but I hope, as Captain Hutton has revived the question so well, that interest may be reawakened. We do want a book. I have heard an instructor lately complaining that the book was out of print, and that he wished to have something to refer to. I hope we may soon get some good standard text-book that they may go by, in the absence of more practical instruction.

Major WALLER ASHE: Lord Methuen, ladies, and gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I have heard the lecture delivered so admirably by my old brother officer, Captain Hutton, and I shall be pleased if he will allow me to make one or two remarks with regard to my own experiences of swordsmanship in our army. I was educated abroad, at the College Henri Quatre in Paris, and, having been a pupil of Grisière, when I joined my first regiment I brought all my foils and masks with me, and for nine years I carried these foils and masks about as part of my impediments, and never met a single brother officer who cared or wished to fence! At the Cape, when with the 85th Light Infantry, I remember a field day, when General Sir James Jackson, an old Waterloo officer, was commanding, and seeing an infantry Colonel—I won't say my own Colonel, because he might be here to-day—attempting to draw his sword *under* the bridle-arm, the General called out to him, "You will cut your arm off, Colonel!" It never struck the Colonel that he ought to draw his sword *over* the bridle-arm. So little did he know of the weapon he wore. As Adjutant of the same corps I had to teach the officers the regulation sword exercise of those days, and when I had got my pupils into good order, a squad of thirty or forty, every singlestick coming down in unison, and thought I had trained them to perfection, the inspecting field officer said to me *sotto voce*, "Did you ever see such a deplorable spectacle?" I think the same thing has been alluded to by my late friend Sir Richard Burton, in his admirable remarks on "Sword Exercise," as practised in the British army. On joining the King's Dragoon Guards, I found the swordsmanship a little better. My friend on my

right, General Marsland, was my subaltern at that time, and he and I did have a bout or two occasionally with singlesticks or sabres, but I do not think he cared much for the point or foil play. In the King's Dragoon Guards I took the trouble to consult my sergeant-major, and presented foils, masks, and singlesticks to the men of my troop, when I found they were only too glad to get an opportunity of learning to fence when they had any officers to teach them and give the example. Colonel, now General, Sayer was my Commanding Officer in those days, and, I am proud to remember, he commended me very much for the trouble I took and the example I set. I hope Captain Hutton's eloquent lecture will lead to a real revival of this splendid and noble art. I fenced with Angelo when he was ninety, and he certainly was not a decrepid old man, nor did he suffer from curvature of the spine from fencing. In conclusion, I am very glad to have an opportunity of saying this at Captain Hutton's brilliant exposition, seeing that we have a practical swordsman like Lord Methuen, now Commanding the Home District, in the chair, as such a conjunction does not often occur as getting a good lecturer and a good chairman, both masters in the noble art of fence.

Captain CYRIL MATTHEY, London Rifle Brigade: Captain Hutton has told us that the want of enthusiasm for swordsmanship is a good deal due, in the first place, to the apathy shown on this subject by the authorities at our public schools. This was undoubtedly the case in the public school where I was brought up about twelve years ago, and I do not think it has altered since then. We had our army classes there, but I do not think anything whatever was done in conjunction with them to train the boys physically. Some few of them who were enrolled in the school rifle corps were trained in the rifle exercises, but that was not as compulsory as it should have been. With regard to the art of fence as taught in the school, we had an instructor who came down once a week in the afternoon, and during the few hours that he was there he had to give lessons in foil fencing only to the very small number of boys who turned up to take their lessons. It was essentially, for so I must call it, an "unpopular sport." Possibly the reason of its unpopularity was that cricket and football were naturally the games mostly played there, and if a boy wanted to take his lesson in fencing he had to give up any chance of playing cricket or football for the afternoon, and, as fencing was so totally unrecognised as a sport by the authorities of the school, he preferred to give up any desire that he might have to become proficient in fencing, and take up a much more generally recognised game, like football or tennis. Another reason for this disinclination of the schoolboy to take up fencing may be that it is more of an indoor game than an outdoor game; but that there is first rate material in the public schoolboy of which to make swordsmen I am quite certain. In our rifle corps armoury there were always a few singlesticks and basket hilts lying about, and at various times, when nothing much was going on at intervals between school hours, a few boys used to get together there and began "tapping at one another" with these singlesticks, but as nothing was ever taught them, no kind of instruction whatever, no errors corrected, although the drill instructor was there nearly all the time, the result was most decidedly as unscientific as it could be. If the boys were properly encouraged by the authorities in the same way that they are for other athletics, I am certain a very great deal might be made out of the art, and that they would then go up to Sandhurst or Woolwich or into civilian life, at any rate better grounded in the art of fencing than they are at present. A few words more on the subject of the French system and the English system of fence. From what I have seen, there is no doubt that the French military system is the best, and what leads me to think so, and to be certain of it, is that I never yet knew a man who had been taught by an English military instructor, and had subsequently gone to a French instructor, leave that Frenchman and go back to the English military instructor. I never knew a man who began fencing with a French instructor throw him up for an English military instructor, but I have known very many cases of the opposite, and I think that speaks volumes.

The CHAIRMAN (Lord Methuen): I think we now have had a very full discussion of an able character, and it is a subject on which I am glad to say a few words, because I have two letters here of value, and contradicting to some extent the remarks that have been made with regard to the apathy that is shown by head-

masters in public schools as to the noble art of fencing. I was writing to Dr. Warre, the head-master of Eton, on quite another subject last week, when he did not even know that this lecture was to be delivered, and he writes to me as follows: "On the physical side there are two things which should be encouraged which now are not encouraged, and often are begun too late. No. 1. Physical drill of a certain kind, tending to set up the frame and expand the chest. N.B.—Do not advocate gymnastics for boys. They have games, and Nature requires that something shall be kept in reserve. Gymnastics are quite right from nineteen to twenty-five. Swordsmanship: this ought to be encouraged for boys. They can learn it quickly, more quickly than men. It is good for eye and hand, and it is also helpful in after time." So much for a head-master of a school and apathy. Now I received a letter from General Keith Fraser, Inspector-General of Cavalry, containing the following words: "(1) I agree with Captain Hutton as to the immense advantage it would be to boys destined for the army and the army classes in public schools if they were obliged to go through a course of instruction in fencing. I can speak from personal experience of the value of learning early in life from a good master, though for many years after I did not again fence." Gentlemen, I deprecate strongly anything that would interfere with the open-air games of the public schools. I say, and I believe I carry the feeling of this meeting with me, that it is those games that are played on the playing fields at Eton and elsewhere that lead our officers to honour and to glory; it is those games that make leaders of men, and there is a healthy rivalry, there is a fascination, there is an excitement and an uncertainty about games like that to schoolboys which, I contend, fencing will never give. I speak as one who has been fond of fencing himself, from the time that he joined. I perhaps took up fencing because I did not approve of my face being made a morable target for the long or short range for professors of the noble art of self-defence, and therefore quitted boxing for fencing, but I cannot name to you two exercises that I think develop mind and body more than boxing and fencing. Whether it could be possible for the authorities to force candidates for Sandhurst or Woolwich, or passing through the Militia into the army, to go through a qualifying examination in fencing, I cannot say, but I think it would be an inestimable advantage. I think that the amount of fencing that could be learnt at a public school, as Captain Hutton says, in three hours per week could not interfere with the outdoor games, and I believe that if you are to introduce any system of fencing into our army it will be extremely difficult to find the material on which to work, unless you induce the boys in public schools to learn, as General Keith Fraser says, when they are young, and to be capable of receiving the tuition that they will get from Frenchmen. It is not an exercise, believe me, that it is at all pleasant to learn beyond a certain age. It is not an exercise that I advise people after thirty to take up. Fencing and gymnastics, I contend, do not go together. I feel quite certain that Captain Hutton had no wish whatever to say an unkind word about anybody, alive or dead, but there are duties that men have to do; they have to speak out, and the great harm that is done in this life is when a man has an opinion of his own and is afraid to state it. It is not Mr. McLaren, it is not General Hammersley, it is not Colonel Fox that Captain Hutton is speaking about; it is the general system and the way that fencing is taught in England. I contend that fencing is not an English growth. It is no more popular in England, or Germany, or Austria, or Russia, than cricket and other outdoor games are in France. It is a growth of France, of Spain, and Italy. It will not be a plant that you will find grow naturally in England. You will have to nurse it, and if fencing is to gain the place that it should occupy, I contend that it is for us officers in the army to induce the authorities to give us good masters, to give us our *salles d'armes* in London, if you like, for fencing practice; but let it be clearly understood that in six months it is impossible for any one to learn fencing and gymnastics together. It is not the fault of the officers, it is not the fault of the teachers, that fencing does not occupy the position that it ought in the army; it is I think because we have not yet shown ourselves sufficiently energetic, or have not put sufficient pressure on the authorities to induce them to come and aid us to teach what we wish to learn. Now, gentlemen, I have nothing more to say, unless you will allow me to read a little more of General Keith Fraser's letter: "It is utterly impossible to train com-

petent instructors under our present system of combining gymnastics and fencing, giving the greatest importance to the former, and trying to train competent instructors in six months. I know how zealously and perseveringly many of our army fencing instructors work, and I always feel sorry for them in giving class lessons. I am sure that the system of some foreign armies of individual teaching, both with regard to equitation and swordsmanship, is the right one. Until we have established a thoroughly good school of fencing in England we must go to France or to Italy for instruction. In my last regiment, the 1st Life Guards, in the fifties and sixties, there were some famous swordsmen, such as St. John, and so on. In conclusion, I have only to say this of fencing, that those who have once taken it up will find it almost the only exercise that I can think of now that will see them through life." Up to fifty you are as quick as you were at twenty; from fifty to sixty you imagine you are as quick, although in reality you find you neither gain hits nor acknowledge hits with the same quickness that you did when you were younger. But it is the one exercise that, I contend, in no way taxes the brain. I have gone away from my office, perhaps having done as much work as some for a good many hours, and I have gone to the school of arms with tired brain and body, and I have been able to go home and feel that that hour's fencing has set me straight for doing another two hours' work if I wish it. I tell you it is unfair to fencing to say that it will either give curvature of the spine or affect the brain in any way. I have simply to finish by thanking Captain Hutton for his lecture, and also all those gentlemen who have assisted in its discussion.