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# Cannon balls

Sir, – Fernand Braudel may well have correctly recalled the story of how in the Crimean War, “the cannon balls used against the Russians had been heated until they were red hot” (see Douglas Johnson’s piece, May 3), but does the story really make any physical or military sense? Iron expands when heated, and since a cannon requires the ball to be a close fit to the barrel, then heating might actually prevent the ball being loaded. Even if loading were possible, it would surely be a brave gunner who would load a red-hot ball into a cannon already primed with gunpowder? And militarily, would the effect on the enemy, beyond the merely symbolic, have merited the additional effort and inconvenience? Perhaps instead this is an early example of the genre now known as “urban myths”.

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