

THE BATTLE OF SOLFERINO

Galignam's Messenger

We arrived at Castiglione at six o'clock yesterday morning, and found a column of French troops engaged at half a league distance with the Austrians, commanded by their Emperor in person, and who had, it is said, promised that he would take them to dine at Milan in the evening, and on the following day drown all the Allies in the Ticino. It is unnecessary to say that the Austrian army was a most formidable one. The attack, which commenced at Solferino, near Castiglione and the Lake of Garda, and on one of the hills of the chain of the Tyrolean mountains, did not take place without material losses on the part of the French, for the two regiments—the Ninety-first and Ninety-eighth—of the line, and the Seventeenth battalion of foot chasseurs, had to contend against a force ten times superior in number, and advantageously posted on a rising ground. The French began to fall back, overcome by numbers, when the battalion of chasseurs of the Guard, and the first two regiments of Voltigeurs, forming together the First brigade of the Second division, under General Camou, came to their assistance. On seeing this reinforcement the former force rallied and rushed on the enemy, who were driven from their position. They were pursued at the point of the bayonet to the bottom of the ravine, where there was a village, where other Austrian troops were posted. The firing recommenced from the windows of the houses and from loopholes in the walls, which caused considerable losses. The Austrians were, however, at last driven out of the village, and from six or eight other strong positions which they occupied on the hills along the Lake of Garda. Several other villages were also carried. At length the French had expended all their ammunition, and had nothing left but their bayonets. They made good use of that weapon, but the enemy perceiving their situation ceased their retreat.

Fortunately, at that time, the Zouaves arrived and supported the enemy's fire with artillery while a supply of ammunition was distributed. That being soon done, a charge was made, and the Austrians retired on the strong village of Cavriana, where they intrenched themselves in the houses and on the towers of the churches, whence they kept up a galling fire. As soon, however, as the French got on the hill on which the village is built, a horrible carnage was made among the enemy, and they were driven back on Peschiera. While the infantry of the Guard were performing those exploits on the hills, the cavalry, which had only joined during the last few days, were beating the Austrian cavalry in the plain."

Harper's Weekly (23 July 1859), pp. 470-471.