

# THE BATTLE OF SOLFERINO

Mr. Raymond, of the *New York Times*

The battle commenced at a little before five o'clock in the morning—not far from sunrise. Just back of Castiglione rises a high range of hills—which projects a mile or thereabout into the plain and then breaks off toward the left into a wide expanse of smaller hills, and so into the rolling surface which makes that portion of the plain. The Austrians had taken position upon these hills, planting cannon upon those nearest to Castiglione which they could approach, as the French army was in full force in and around that little village; and had stationed their immense array all over the surrounding plain. As nearly as we can now learn the Emperor Francis-Joseph had collected here not less than 225,000 troops, and commanded them in person. His evident purpose was to make a stand here, and risk the fortunes of the war upon the hazards of the day. Napoleon promptly accepted the challenge, and commenced the attack as soon as it was light this morning, by placing cannon upon the hills still nearer to Castiglione than those held by the Austrians, and opening fire upon them on the heights beyond. He took his own stand upon the highest of these, a steep, sharp-backed ridge, which commands a magnificent view of the entire circuit of the plain, and from that point directed the entire movements of his army during the early portion of the day. The French very soon drove the enemy out of the posts they held nearest to the town, and followed them into the small villages of the plain below. The first of these was Solferino, where they had a sharp and protracted engagement. The Austrians disputed every inch of the ground, and fought here, as they did throughout the day, with the utmost desperation. They were three times driven out of the town, before they would stay out. The people of the village, moreover, took part against the French, upon whom they fired from their windows, and the French were compelled, in self-defense, to burn the town.

When they found it impossible to hold their ground any longer, they fell back, slowly and steadily, until they reached the village of Volta, which, as you will see by the map, lies directly southeast from Castiglione, and is only about a mile from the River Mincio, from which, however, it is separated by a range of hills. Upon these hills, in the rear of the town, and overlooking it completely on the south and southeast sides, the Austrians had planted very formidable batteries; and when I arrived upon the field and went at once to the height where the Emperor had stood at the opening of the engagement, but which he had left an hour before to follow his victorious troops, these batteries were blazing away upon the French who were stationed on the plain below. I was too far off to observe with any accuracy the successive steps of the action, but I could distinctly see the troops stationed upon the broad plain, and moving up in masses toward the front, where the artillery was posted, as their services were required. But as soon as they reached this point they were speedily enveloped in the smoke of the cannon, and disappeared from observation. But the general result was soon made evident by the slackening of the Austrian fire, and by the falling back of their smoke, and a corresponding advance on the part of that which rose from the French artillery. The cannonading at that point lasted for over an hour; but in precisely what direction the Austrians retreated it was not possible from the position I occupied to see. I was afraid to change it, moreover, because, although I might easily have gone more directly and closely upon the field, I could not have found any eminence upon the plain from which I could have had so sweeping and complete a view.

But the battle continued to rage all over the region northwest of a line connecting the towns of Castiglione, Solferino, and Volta. At one point after another a sharp cannonading would arise and continue for half or three-quarters of an hour—and after each successive engagement of this kind, the result became apparent in the retreat of the Austrians and the advance of the French forces. During all the early part of the day the sky had been clear and the weather hot. But clouds began to gather at about noon, and at five o'clock, while the cannonade was at its height, a tremendous thunder-storm rolled up from the northwest; the wind came first, sweeping from the parched streets an enormous cloud of dust, and was soon followed by a heavy fall of rain, accompanied by vivid lightning and rapid explosions of rattling thunder. The storm lasted for about an hour, and the cannonading, so far as we could distinguish, was suspended. Then the rain ceased, the clouds blew away, the sun shone out again, and the air was cooled and perfectly delightful. Though the cannon may have ceased for a time to take part in it, the fight had meantime gone on.”