

THE BATTLE OF KONIGGRÄTZ.

THE great battle in Bohemia, which at the first blush seemed decisive of the war, is to be known in history as the battle of Königgrätz. But it was really fought on the left bank of the Bistritz, seven miles from that fortress, and as the fatal blow was delivered against the Austrian army at the village of Chlum, that village appears to have the best claim to the honour of giving its name to the victory. The Prussians have determined otherwise, and have named the action after the fortress which overlooked nearly the whole scene of the battle.

The Bistritz is a small stream that, rising to the north of Miletin, flows in a southerly and then westerly direction parallel to the Elbe. Opposite Königgrätz it meanders through a shallow valley, amidst wooded slopes, numerous villages, and well cultivated fields. The hills and slopes on the eastern bank formed the Austrian position. The village of Lipa stood on the high ground in the centre. To the northward of that point stretched the right, through the undulating ground as far as Benatek, on the western slope, and the extreme right trended back somewhat towards the Elbe at Smirlintz. Between Lipa and this village, and in rear of Benatek, stood the village of Chlum. The high road from Gitschin crosses the Bistritz at Sadowa, down in the valley, ascends the hill to Lipa, and thence goes in a south-easterly direction to Königgrätz. The space between this road and Benatek is partly filled by a wood, but in other parts the hill sides and tops were open. To the left of Lipa the ridge passes on in a southerly direction towards Nechanitz, a place seven miles below Sadowa. Between Nechanitz and Lipa are the villages of Dohalitz and Mokrowans, between these latter stands a castle on the river brink, and between Dohalitz and Lipa, quite up to the main road, a thick wood, running down the hill-side towards the river. On the opposite bank of the Bistritz was a corresponding range of undulating hills, over which ran the high road to Sadowa, and behind this ridge was the Prussian army under Prince Charles.

This was the field selected by General Benedek upon which to fight a decisive battle. It had been carefully surveyed and partially entrenched. The trees on the wood above Sadowa had been cut down, and their tops and branches set towards the enemy. Behind this abatis, on the higher ground towards Lipa, were regularly constructed field works, with embrasures for guns and cover for infantry. Taught by the severe conflicts in open ground about Skalit and Trautenau, the Austrian General had determined to find some compensation for an inferior armament by using the spade. Part of the position on the right, but obviously not the whole, was also entrenched, and thus, with the aid of woods and earthworks, Benedek hoped to win. He occupied this position with seven corps, the Saxons, an immense body of horse, and upwards of 500 guns, the whole force amounting perhaps to something less than 200,000 men. The extremest, towards Nechanitz, in strong ground fronting the lakes of the Bistritz, were the Saxons, having as a reserve the 8th corps. The 10th stood in and behind Mokrowans, having on its right the 3rd, reaching to the wood and high road. Next, in the centre, stood the 4th, having the 2nd on its right, and in rear as a reserve, to the centre and right, were the 6th and 1st, and the mass of the glittering horsemen, four strong divisions. The artillery was skilfully disposed along the front and on the flanks of the divisions, with strong reserves below the interior slope. The outposts of course extended to the river along the whole front. This was an imposing array, planted on strong ground, and by several thousands numerically superior to the Prussian army, as yet hidden from view, but numerically inferior to the great host of the combined armies, which skilful brains were bringing to bear on front, flank, and rear. For not only had Prince Charles come up to the Bistritz from Gitschin with 150,000 men and 750 guns, but, though General Benedek appears not to have known it, the Crown Prince, with upwards of 100,000 men and guns in proportion, was marching southward between the Bistritz and the Elbe, square to the right flank of the Austrian line of battle.

Assured of the potent aid of the Crown Prince by noon, Prince Charles brought nearly three-fourths of his troops up to the Bistritz on both sides of Sadowa, upon a front corresponding to that of the Austrians, and sent the remainder under General Herwarth through Smidar and New Bidezow to turn the left of the Austrians through Nechanitz. Thus the Prussian tactical combination was most powerful. It appeared to aim at nothing less than enveloping the Austrians, by turning both flanks, and this great result was nearly accomplished. But we may conjecture that the movement of Herwarth was intended to draw attention

towards that side, in order that the coming attack of the Crown Prince might take place under the most favourable circumstances, and to give Herwarth a position whence he might cut in on the Austrian line of retreat. That line of retreat was south-east to Königgrätz and the Elbe, over which several bridges had been thrown, and southwards towards Pardubitz, at the elbow of the river.

The action began about half-past seven by dropping shots, followed by a severe cannonade, kept up with great vigour for nearly three hours. The Prussians brought to bear a great superiority of guns, and gradually drove the Austrian artillery to positions on the higher ground. During this period there was no infantry battle, but, covered by the cannonade, the Prussians had got their men close to the stream ready for a rush. About ten o'clock the columns were set in motion, Benatek was set on fire and stormed, but the Prussians, breech-loaders notwithstanding, were a full hour engaged in a close contest before they could expel the Austrians from the other villages in the valley. General Herwarth, too, had come into action, but he made comparatively little progress against the Saxons until towards the close of the day. The chief encounter was on a line about a mile to the right and left of Sadowa. For when the Austrians were thrust out of the villages they retired but a little way up the slopes, and there stood fast, until they were again pressed further back through the woods on both flanks of Sadowa, but they could not be expelled from the great entrenched wood above that village. The fight now became stationary, the breech-loader did not tell so heavily in the thickets, and the Austrian artillery filled the Prussian half of the woods with shells and steady musketry. The first troops engaged were exhausted, and fresh divisions sent in made a spirited dash, but were speedily brought up, and even compelled to give ground. It was now past noon. The Prussians were across the Bistritz in a long concave line. The Austrian front of battle was convex, the salient being the wood above Sadowa. They were very confident of winning, and their swarms of splendid cavalry were eagerly, but patiently, waiting in the plains below for the signal to burst forth upon the heels of a beaten army. The Prussians had become anxious. There were no signs of the Crown Prince, none, that is, visible to them. The infantry had been drawn out of the battle under cover, and even the batteries were giving ground. The line of the fight was marked by burning villages, and by clouds of smoke hovering low among the woods and along the fields. For the air was damp and heavy; showers fell occasionally. But though the infantry fight was brought to a stand the thunder of the guns was incessant, and the horrid tumult of battle filled the country around for miles.

While the Austrians were calculating that a little more would give them a striking triumph, and while the Prussians were preparing for the worst, an unseen foe was making ready for a decisive spring upon the very heart of the position. The Crown Prince, true to his promise, had brought his army down between the Elbe and the Bistritz, and had arrived with two corps close to the fatal spot before twelve o'clock. But he did not attack because his remaining two corps were still on the march, and he meant his blow to be deadly. Benedek had been informed that there were Prussian troops on his right as soon as they arrived. What orders he gave does not appear, except that some cavalry were pushed up to Chlum. About an hour later he went himself from Lipa towards the right, but seemed satisfied, for he returned. All the time an artillery engagement had been in progress on that side, but no infantry attack or show of infantry in great force. Meantime it is stated that the 4th corps had made a forward movement, and that the 2nd had conformed; but if this were done, it left a weak point in the line, and that point the vital one about Chlum. Now the 1st corps under Clam-Gallas was the reserve here, and it does not appear that this body was advanced into the comparative gap. Be that as it may, here was a weakly held point leading directly into the rear of the Austrian centre. And it was soon seized. For the Crown Prince, having been joined by his other two corps, pushed forward along the whole line from the railway, which descends the right bank of the Elbe to the rear of the Austrian right. Mass after mass came out of the hollows and crowned the ridges. The force was equal to one-half the Austrian army, and to oppose it there were only two Austrian corps and the horsemen. Onward swept this torrent of men, covered by a powerful artillery. Effectual resistance was impossible. The Austrian infantry were met by that "fire of surprising volume and quickness" which denotes the presence of the breech-loader; they tried to use the bayonet, but could not reach their enemies. General

Benedek hurried up into the midst of this tempest, and it is said of him that, seeing the battle lost, he sought death in the foremost ranks as Ney sought it at Waterloo, but in vain. At the very moment when he thought victory was about to reward his efforts, lo! there was defeat, perhaps utter ruin. He rode off to draw his army out of the jaws of destruction. The Prussians did not give him time. The army of Prince Charles, hearing the loud roar of the Crown Prince's battle surging along the Austrian rear, sprang forward, and bore down all before them. Rushing through the Austrian position, they crowned the hills, brought up their artillery to hurl shells into the masses retiring across the valley, and launched their cavalry in pursuit. But it is recorded by a military eye-witness that the Austrian artillery, which had behaved with shining courage all day, now disputed the road on every ridge, while both cavalry and infantry ever and anon checked the Prussian horse. And although five hours still went by before the last shot was fired, yet the Austrian army was thoroughly beaten, with heavy loss of guns and killed and wounded—altogether 180 guns, it is said, and 40,000 men. The fugitives streamed over the Elbe by the bridges prepared by military foresight, and away down the river to Pardubitz, and so by devious routes towards Brünn. The sun went down over the flaming field, and a great empire had been shaken to its centre.

General Benedek has met with an unquestionable defeat upon the field of battle. We are still too ill informed respecting the whole conduct of the campaign to determine how much that defeat was due to imperfect strategy, to defective tactics, and to an inferior armament. For our part, on the first head, we are still disposed to believe that in principle Benedek adopted the right mode of defending the Empire. It was reasonable to believe that he could prevent the Crown Prince from forcing his way by Nachod and Trautenau, and hold him fast while he overwhelmed Prince Charles. That he could have defeated Prince Charles, we admit, is doubtful; but in principle he was right in trying to keep back the Crown Prince, while he turned with all the troops he could muster on his cousin. Had he thrown part of his army forward to Reichenberg, and kept the rest near Josephstadt, he must have been beaten, for it is an established fact that a mountain frontier is the most difficult of all to defend, and that he who tries it runs the risk of a defeat in detail. He was therefore right to show only a front towards Reichenberg, and to hold his main body in a central position. Count Clam-Gallas ought not to have fought battles either at Mönchengrätz or Gitschin, but on the other hand everything was to be done that could be done to stop and defeat the Crown Prince. What was it, then, errors of strategy and tactics apart, which turned the scale so decisively but the formidable breech-loader? Nowhere, even with the odds of men in their favour, could the Austrians stand up and fight without cover. On the Bistritz alone did they entrench, and there, it is true, their entrenchments stood them in good stead, and made them a match for Prince Charles. But even there, when the infantry fought got into the open, the poor muzzle-loader stood no chance. At the Bistritz, as at Nachod and Trautenau, the Austrians were outnumbered as well as outarmed, if we may use such a term, and the tactical combination which ruined the host was a direct consequence of the superiority which the new weapon had established for itself on every point. One simple question disposes of the whole cavil about the influence of the breech-loader on the campaign. What would have been the result, not at the Bistritz, but in the preliminary fights, had the Austrians been also armed with breech-loaders? We are far from imputing the decisive successes of the Prussians to mechanical appliances alone. The military skill of the Prussians is conspicuous, but it is not more conspicuous than the other facts, that the Prussians were one-fourth superior in number, and were armed with a musket at least three times as effective as that opposed to it. "A defensive position at Brünn or at Olmutz," says a military eye-witness, "may be successful for a time, but nothing can compensate for inferiority of weapons. . . . In the great battle which has occurred the artillery fire on our side was sufficient to cause great loss to the enemy, and even to give this [the Austrian] army the advantage for some time, but when it came to close quarters the breech-loading small arm prevailed over courage, strength, and an obstinate adherence to old principles of war." That is the fact, let the strategists say what they will, which this nation must bear in mind. A good general we may or may not have, but it is utterly unpardonable, if after this Bohemian experience, we have not what we can so easily get, the very best arm for our infantry soldiers.

THE STATE OF GERMANY.

Heidelberg, June 10, 1866.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

EVEN a week ago I could observe how, in the course of a single day, political feeling changed in every German State through which I was passing, and now I remark how quickly events change tendencies in the same country. Let me speak of Baden, for I am told that the maxim, "*Ab mo disce omnes*," holds good in this instance, as far as at least as the small States which stick to the old Bund are concerned. Some ten days ago the Prussians, or Gotha party, as they are indifferently called, found themselves in such a small minority that they scarcely moved. The Democrats, on the contrary, or the German party, as they willingly style themselves, raised their voice loud and strong, and their violent speeches met with a sonorous echo in the little but happy Grand Duchy. The people in Baden are so thoroughly contented (or rather were so before this wicked war drove all foreign visitors away), they are also so entirely free and independent, that outside the narrow though highly intellectual circle of Heidelberg and Freiburg professors, who dream of a mighty, glorious Germany, they saw no earthly reason to wish for a change. They know well enough that centralization means utter annihilation of local freedom, and felt altogether disinclined to become Prussians.

These sentiments were declared loudly enough in public sittings of the *Volks-Verein*, where, among others, the well known journalist Grün and the two clever sons of old Professor Mittermaier were foremost in indignant denunciations of Cæsarism in general and Bismark in particular. One of the Mittermaiers even went so far as to indicate a remedy, and this was a Badish *Volkswehr*, the arming of the whole population. He quoted, to some purpose, the American Federal soldiers and the English volunteers, but, as I ventured to ask, how in the world could a regiment of British volunteers, be they ever so fierce, resist the victorious Prussian army? "If we do not do it, we are lost," answered the patriot, and, sad to say, I believe they are even if they do it.

Well, the dream was soon broken by the great victories won by the Prussians, and now the needle gun, which was all but laughed at, is the theme of universal praise. Bavarians, Badenses, and Hessians are terribly cast down; their last hope of success in war is gone, and their protectors, the Austrians, are unable to protect themselves. The Prussians have indeed carried a great day; they may be hated quite as much, and even more so than before, but they are thoroughly respected, nay, admired. Every one acknowledges that they always knew, and still know, what they "are about," and since their antagonists are by no means united in their views and designs, there is every probability of their complete success. That the Prussians, who are exclusively Germans, have proved themselves so surprisingly strong and warlike flatters every German heart outside the pale of professed politicians. Thus the feelings were already pretty well divided, when the news of the armistice, of the cession of Venetia to the French Emperor, broke out like a thunderbolt.

I really felt for my German friends; it was a bitter pill to swallow. "Napoleon is Emperor of France and King of Germany," sadly said a tried and well known patriot to me. I was at Strasbourg, when a gendarme came galloping to the station and read the telegram aloud. We crossed the Rhine, and brought it to Kehl. At Strasbourg there was shouting and rejoicing; at Kehl the poor Germans hung their heavy heads, and blushed painfully. What has become now of the old maxim that the banks of the Rhine must be defended on the Po? Well, if there were no consolation in the fact that, come what may, *one* strong Northern Germany, be it even called by the hated name of Vienna, cannot but become a blessing to the people, the moment would be terrible for the noble-minded men who love their country and freedom equally well. Every nation has to undergo this horrid process of unification, which entails so much suffering and tyranny. It is a work achieved by Louis XI. and Richelieu, by Napoleons and Bismarks, and Germany must submit, like France has done in her day.

At Heidelberg, a week ago, all was excitement and bluster, the Democrats spoke in the *Volks-Verein*, the Gotha-Prussians conversed in the Museum, the Great-German party listened in the hotels to the diurnal talk of M. Seinguerlet, the French correspondent of *Le Temps*, the ladies made black-red-golden scarfs for the Wurtemberg soldiers. To-day things are sadly changed. The Prussian party publish placards and sign addresses, calling upon the Grand Duke to draw the Badish troops back from the Bunder army. The Progressivists have been beaten in the elections; Bismark and Napoleon reign supreme; the Great-Germans feel